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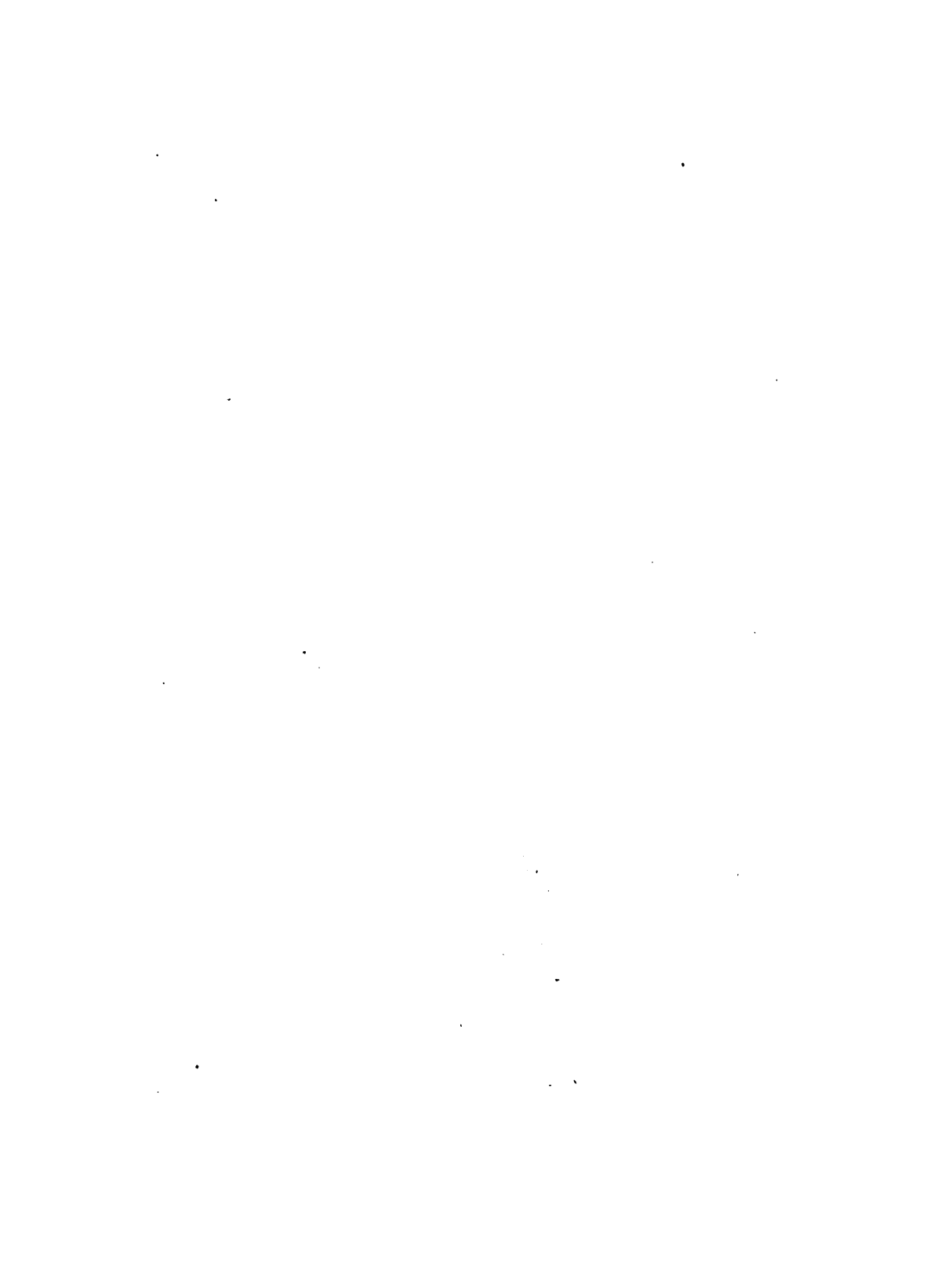
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**SIMPLE READINGS ON THE
GOSPELS.**



SIMPLE READINGS ON THE GOSPELS.

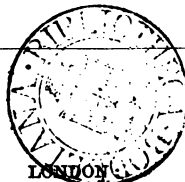
ARRANGED IN DAILY PORTIONS,

FOR THE USE OF

Families and Schools.

Compiled from the Works of the
Rev. J. C. RYLE, B.A., the Rev. ALBERT BARNES, and other Expository writers.

By A. S. F.



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SIMPLE READINGS.

I.

The Saviour's birth at Bethlehem—King Herod's consequent alarm.

ST. MATTHEW II. 1—6.

1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

3 When Herod the king had heard *these things*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

5 And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judæa: for thus it is written by the prophet,

6 And thou Bethlehem, *in* the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

THE New Testament begins with the history of the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. No part of the Bible is so important as this, and no part is so full and complete. Four distinct Gospels tell us the story of Christ's doings and dying. Four times we read the precious account of His works and words. How thankful we ought to be for this! To know Christ is Life eternal. To believe in Christ is to have peace with God. To follow Christ is to be a true Christian. To be with Christ will be heaven itself. We can never hear too much about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Bethlehem, the birth-place of our blessed Saviour, was a small town about six miles south of Jerusalem. The word Bethlehem means "house of bread." The name was probably given to the place on account of the great fertility of the surrounding country. It was called Bethlehem of *Judæa*, to distinguish it from a town of the same name in Galilee.

It is not known who the *wise men* were. We are only told that they came from the East: whether Chaldeans or Arabians we cannot say. They might have been learned men among the Eastern nations,—perhaps philosophers, priests, or astronomers, who were held in high esteem at the Eastern courts, where they were admitted as counsellors, and their advice often taken in times of difficulty.

Jerusalem was the capital city of *Judæa*, in which was the temple devoted to the public worship of God, where also many important transactions in the life of the Saviour occurred, and which was the scene of His death.

There was at this time a prevalent expectation that some remarkable person was about to appear in *Judæa*. The Jews were anxiously looking for the coming of the Messiah. By comparing the time mentioned by Daniel (ch. ix. 25—27), they knew that the period was approaching when the Messiah should be born into the world. The appearance of a star was regarded in olden times as an omen of some wonderful event. The wise men therefore considered this star as a sign that the long expected Prince was born. It is possible that they may have been led to this belief from the prophecy of

Balaam: "There shall come a star out of Jacob."
(Numb. xxiv. 17.)

This star may have been a luminous body or meteor, such as we see sometimes shooting across the sky. Whatever it was, it directed the wise men to Jerusalem, where they came for the purpose of worshipping the new-born King.

Herod was troubled at hearing of their arrival. He had obtained the kingdom by great crimes, and by shedding much blood. He was therefore easily alarmed; and as the coming of the Messiah was so generally expected, he feared that his reign was about to end. The people of Jerusalem who were *his* friends, would doubtless also be alarmed at the idea of one born King of the Jews, although there were many waiting for the "Consolation of Israel," to whom the coming of the Messiah would be a matter of joy.

The "chief priests" were not only the High Priest and his deputy, but also the heads or chiefs of the twenty-four classes into which David had divided the sacerdotal families.

The "scribes" were learned men who wrote the public records, skilled in the law, and members of the great Council of the nation called the Sanhedrim. They were also styled lawyers and doctors of the law.

The Sanhedrim was composed of seventy-two men, who had the charge of the civil and religious affairs of the Jews, and whose business it was to study and explain their Scriptures. On this occasion, Herod in alarm called them together, professedly to make inquiry respecting the birth of the Messiah, as his object was

to ascertain this from prophecy, in order that he might strike an effectual blow.

The prophet Micah had foretold (Micah v. 2) that this event was to take place at Bethlehem, and at Bethlehem Christ was born ; not under the roof of His mother's house, but in a strange place, and at an "inn." He was not laid in a carefully prepared cradle, but as St. Luke says, "He was laid in a manger, because there was no room in the inn." We see here the grace and condescension of Christ. To become poor as the very poorest of mankind, and lowly as the very lowliest ; this is a love that passeth knowledge ; it is unspeakable and unsearchable. All through His life He was poor for our sakes,—from the hour of His birth to the hour of His death. "Through His poverty we are made rich." (2 Cor. viii. 9.) Through His life of suffering, as well as His death, He has obtained eternal redemption for us. Never let us forget that through this humiliation, "Jesus has purchased for us a title to glory."

Bright and joyful is the morn,
For to us a child is born ;
From the highest realms of heaven
Unto us a Son is given.

Come and worship at His feet ;
Yield to Christ the homage meet
From His manger to His throne :
Homage due to God alone !

II.

The visit of the Magi ; or, wise men from the East.

ST. MATTHEW II. 7—12.

7 Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child ; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

9 When they had heard the king, they departed ; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him : and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts ; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

WE find that Herod took all possible means to obtain accurate information respecting the young Child, in order that he might be sure of destroying Him. He sent the wise men to Bethlehem that they might actually see Him. This might have looked suspicious had he not clothed it with the pretence that "he might go and worship Him also."

We read that "the star went before" these wise men. They may have lost sight of it after commencing their journey from the East. It is probable that it appeared to them at first in the direction of Jerusalem, whence they concluded that the expected King had been born ; and on arriving there it was important that they should

be directed to the very place where He was, and the star again appeared. For this reason they rejoiced: they felt assured they were under a heavenly guidance, and would be conducted to the new-born King of the Jews. We may learn from this how God will guide those who are disposed to find the Saviour. Even if for a time the light should be withdrawn, yet it will again appear, and direct them in the way to the Redeemer.

We read that these wise men presented gifts to the young Child. This was because they supposed He was to become a distinguished Prince and Conqueror.

It was customary at the birth of a prince to show respect by making him presents, or offerings of this kind. This usage is still common in the East: persons of rank are not approached without a valuable present. Frankincense was a fragrant gum used in their worship: burned as a pleasant offering to God. Myrrh was also obtained from a tree: the name denotes *bitterness*. It was used chiefly in embalming the dead, because it preserves from putrefaction. These offerings were made because they were the most valuable things which their country produced; and were therefore presented as tokens of homage or respect, which they wished to pay to the new-born King.

These wise men were warned of God not to return to Herod, doubtless because if they had given him precise information as to where the young Child was, it would have been easy for him to send forth and slay Him. Thus we see how God watches over those whom He loves, how He foils the purposes of wicked men, and will deliver His own out of the hands of those who would destroy them.

We may draw some practical lessons from this story of "the wise men from the East."

First. It is not always those who have most religious privileges who give Christ most honour. We might have thought that the Scribes and Pharisees would have been the first to hasten to Bethlehem on the slightest rumour that the Saviour was born; but it was not so. A few unknown strangers from a distant land were the first (except the shepherds mentioned by St. Luke) to rejoice at His birth. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." (John i. 11.)

Secondly. There may be knowledge of Scripture in the head while there is no grace in the heart. Herod sent to inquire of the priests and elders "where Christ should be born." They returned a ready answer to him, and showed an accurate acquaintance with the letter of Scripture. But they never went to Bethlehem to seek for the coming Saviour. They would not believe in Him when He ministered among them: their heads were better than their hearts. Let us beware of resting satisfied with head-knowledge. It is an excellent thing when rightly used: but a man may have much of it, and yet perish everlastingly.

Thirdly. We have here an example of spiritual diligence. What trouble it must have cost these wise men to travel from their homes to the house where Jesus was born. The fatigues of an Eastern traveller are far greater than we in England can at all understand. The time that such a journey would occupy must necessarily have been very great; the dangers to be encountered were neither few nor small. But

none of these things moved them: they had set their hearts on seeing Him "that was born King of the Jews," and they never rested till they saw Him. It would be well for all professing Christians if they were more ready to follow the example of these good men. It is a subject deserving serious consideration.

Lastly. We have in these wise men a striking example of *faith*. They believed in Christ when they had never seen Him; they believed in Him when they saw Him a little Infant on Mary's knees. They heard no teaching to persuade them; they saw no miracles to convince them; they beheld no signs of Divinity and greatness to over-awe them; yet they believed that He was the Divine Saviour of the world: "They fell down and worshipped Him."

Blessed indeed are they who can believe after this manner.

Hail, Thou source of every blessing,
Sov'reign Father of mankind!
Gentiles now, Thy grace possessing,
In Thy courts admission find:
Grateful now we fall before Thee,
In Thy Church obtain a place;
Now by faith behold Thy glory,
Praise Thy truth, adore Thy grace!

III.

The Angel's Announcement of Christ's Birth to the Shepherds.

ST. LUKE II. 8—20.

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

18 And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

WE must not leave the story of our Saviour's birth without mentioning St. Luke's description of its announcement to the children of men. It was made privately, at midnight, to a few poor shepherds, without anything of worldly pomp and ostentation.

These shepherds were in the neighbourhood of Bethlehem, which was a place of pasture. It was here that David kept his father's sheep. It was customary for

the shepherds to keep a *watch* of three hours each, by turns, to preserve the sheep from beasts of prey, and from banditti with which all Judæa was at that time infested. There is a deep valley on the north-east of the town, said to be the place where the angels appeared. There is here also a fountain, which contains most delicious water; supposed to be the well referred to in 2 Sam. xxiii. 15—18. Bethlehem was called the “City of David” on account of its having been his birthplace.

The angel of the Lord appeared unto these shepherds, who were “sore afraid” at the marvellous sight; but he at once reassured them, saying he brought good tidings for “all people,”—not only to the Jews, but to the heathen also. The spiritual darkness which had covered the earth for four thousand years was about to be rolled away; the way to pardon and peace with God was about to be thrown open to all mankind. Salvation was no longer to be seen through types and figures alone, but openly, and face to face. The knowledge of God was about to be offered to the whole Gentile world. If these were not “good tidings” there never were tidings that deserved the name.

The angel knew that the shepherds would find it difficult to believe such glorious news, and might afterwards have thought it was a dream; so he said it should be a *sign* that it was true if they found the babe as he described,—“wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.” This manner of clothing infants is still practised in the East, and other countries, and was indeed the custom in England until about a century ago. By a *manger* we are not to understand a place

set apart for horses to eat hay, as with us; for the Easterns have no hay. What is here meant, was an inferior place of accommodation; the middle of which afforded room for cattle, and the sides for persons.

Let us mark the hymn of praise sung by the heavenly host in the hearing of the shepherds. It begins with "Glory to God in the highest." Now is come the highest degree of glory to God, by the appearing of His Son Jesus Christ in the world. He, by His life and death on the cross, will glorify God's attributes,—justice, holiness, mercy, and wisdom,—as they never were glorified before. Creation glorified God, but not so much as redemption.

"Peace on earth," the song goes on. Now is come to earth "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding;" the perfect peace between a holy God and sinful man, which Christ was to purchase with His own blood; the peace which is offered freely to mankind; which once admitted into the heart, makes men live at peace with one another, and will one day overspread the whole world.

"Good will towards men," the song concludes. Now is come the time when God's kindness and good will towards guilty man is to be fully made known. His power was seen in creation, His justice was seen in the flood; but His mercy remained to be fully revealed by the appearing and atonement of Jesus Christ.

Let us also mark the prompt obedience to the heavenly vision displayed by the shepherds. They had no doubts, or questionings, or hesitation. Strange and improbable as the tidings might seem, they at

once acted upon them. They went to Bethlehem in haste; they found every thing exactly as it had been told them; their simple faith received a rich reward; they had the mighty privilege of being the first of all mankind, after Mary and Joseph, who saw with believing eyes the new-born Messiah; they soon returned, "glorifying and praising God" for what they had seen.

While the people wondered at all these things, Mary "kept them," and "pondered them in her heart." How different is idle astonishment from fruitful meditation! How many wonder at the marvels related in God's Word, for one that like Mary ponders on them in the heart, with humble faith and devout affection! In the many things we daily meet with above our comprehension, let us daily reflect that they are as plain to God's wisdom, as easy to His power, whether it be the growth of the grass of the field or the increase of our own stature, the support of our life by food or the nourishment of our souls by grace. In every thing we shall find much beyond our understanding, much to make us humble, thankful, and devout.

Finally, like the shepherds, may we ever believe implicitly, act promptly, and wait for nothing, when the path of duty is clear. Thus shall we find that the journey which is begun in faith will generally end in praise.

Behold the Child, the holy Child,
Born to atone for sin;
And let each ransomed sinner's song
In gratitude begin.

Glory to God on high, on earth
Peace and good will to men;
And let the angels round the throne
Join in a loud amen.

IV.

The Flight into Egypt. Massacre of the Children.

ST. MATTHEW II. 13—18.

13 And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

14 When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:

15 And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.

17 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,

18 In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

THE birth of our blessed Lord was soon followed by persecution; but the providence of God had effectually secured the life of the infant Jesus. The wise men were directed by a heavenly dream to depart into their own country another way; and Joseph was instructed by the same method of revelation to avoid the fury of Herod by removing immediately into Egypt. This country is distant from Bethlehem about sixty miles. Although a Roman province, there were many Jews there, who had a temple and synagogues; and therefore Joseph would be yet among his own countrymen,

but beyond the reach of Herod. It is remarkable that this was the only time in which our Saviour was out of Palestine, and that He was taken to the land where the children of Israel had suffered so long from the oppression of the Egyptian Kings: the very land which was that of bondage and groaning for the Jews, became now the land of refuge and safety for their new-born King.

It is not exactly known at what period Herod began his reign; therefore we cannot determine the time that the holy family remained in Egypt. It seems probable that the Saviour was about a year old when He was taken there.

Herod died, in the thirty-seventh year of his reign, at Jericho, of a most painful and loathsome disease. He was Herod the Great, the first Jewish King of that name; by birth a native of Edom, but had embraced the religion of the Jews. His descendants were called Herod after him, although they had other names. He had four sons and three grandsons, all designated by the name. Herod the Great was a cruel tyrant. Among many other barbarous acts, he put to death his wife, Mariamne, and two of his own sons.

The prophecy, "Out of Egypt have I called my son," is from Hosea xi. 1. There it evidently alludes to God's calling His people out of Egypt under Moses. It might be said to be *fulfilled* in the return of the infant Saviour from Egypt. Herod, finding that he had been deceived by the wise men, was "exceeding wroth:" his fury was stirred up. He had expected to destroy the infant at once; but being unable to do

this, he tried to make sure of his death by causing all the children about the same age to be killed. He therefore sent forth and "slew all the children,"—that is, all the *male* children. His design was to cut off Him that had been born *King* of the Jews. His purpose therefore did not require him to slay the female children. The word "coasts" here means all the hamlets and villages in the neighbourhood of Bethlehem, which not being populous, it is probable that the number slain was not more than twenty or thirty; and these were the children born about the time when the star appeared,—from the age of six months to those who had entered their second year. Thus Herod, apprehending that this young Child he had heard of might prove a powerful Prince, and might interfere with his own sovereign authority, resolved by all means to destroy Him,—so readily does ambition, whether in high or low, lead on the worldly mind from sin to sin; so easy is the progress from pride to jealousy, fraud, violence, and bloodshed. But vainly do the "kings of the earth stand up, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed." (Ps. ii. 2.) The arm of the Lord will surely frustrate the malice of wicked men.

We may observe here how true it is that the rulers of this world are seldom friendly to the cause of God. The Lord Jesus comes down from heaven to save sinners, and at once "Herod the King" seeks to destroy Him. The Lord Jesus was a "Man of sorrows," even from His infancy. His life was in danger from Herod's hatred: His mother and Joseph were obliged to take

Him away by night, and “flee into Egypt.” It was but a type and figure of all His experience while upon earth. The wave of humiliation began to beat over Him when He was but an infant ; but the providence of His Father in heaven over-ruled all, and brought Him back in safety to the land of Israel.

Saviour of men, and God of love,
How sweet Thy gracious name,
With joy that errand we review,
On which Thy mercy came.

Bought with Thy service and Thy blood,
We doubly, Lord, are Thine ;
To Thee our lives we would devote,
To Thee our all resign.

V.

*The Return to Judæa, and subsequent Abode at
Nazareth.*

ST. MATTHEW II. 19—23.

19 But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,

20 Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life.

21 And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.

22 But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judæa in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee:

23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

WE may observe here how death removes the kings of this world just like other men. The rulers of millions have no power to retain life when the hour of their departure comes. The murderer of helpless infants himself must die. Joseph and Mary hear the tidings that "Herod is dead," and at once return in safety to their own land.

The phrase, "they are dead," may refer to both Herod and his son Antipater, who was also most cruel, and was put to death by his father about five days before his own decease. Archelaus, who was the son appointed by Herod the Great to succeed him, was most tyrannical and unpopular. At one of the feasts of the Passover

he caused three thousand of the people to be put to death in the temple and city where they were gathered together to celebrate that feast. After reigning ten years, the people made a representation of his conduct to Augustus, the Roman Emperor, who deposed him, and banished him to Gaul, where he ended his days.

Joseph, knowing the character of Archelaus, and fearing that he and his family would not be safe under his dominion, hesitated about returning into Judæa; but was directed by God in a dream to go into Galilee, where he would be removed from under the immediate power of Archelaus. At that time the Land of Palestine was divided into three parts: Galilee on the north, Samaria in the middle, and Judæa on the south. Galilee was under the government of Herod Antipas, a comparatively mild Prince, and in his dominions Joseph might find safety.

Nazareth was a small town in Galilee, not far from Cana. It was at that time proverbial for wickedness: the character of the inhabitants was such that they were universally hated and despised. To come from Nazareth therefore, and to be called a Nazarene, meant that a person was of low origin, and the worst of characters; even a "root out of a dry ground, having no form or comeliness." This had been predicted of the Messiah by the Prophets. When therefore St. Matthew says that the prophecies were fulfilled, it means that the predictions of the Prophets that He should be of humble life, "despised and rejected of men," had their full accomplishment in His being an inhabitant of Nazareth and condemned as such.

This "city" is now a large village, called Nasara, standing on the side of a barren, rocky eminence, or hill, from the brow of which the inhabitants were about to hurl our Lord down headlong (as we may see in Luke iv. 29). It is now occupied by about three thousand inhabitants of the Christian persuasion, and is visited by many Roman Catholic pilgrims. It contains a convent and two churches,—one called the Church of the Annunciation, which is the finest in the Holy Land, excepting that of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem.

Let us observe what a lesson of *humility* is taught us by the dwelling-place of the Son of God while He was on earth.

In Nazareth the Lord Jesus Christ lived thirty years. There He grew up to man's estate. We know little of the manner in which those thirty years were spent. That He was "subject to Mary and Joseph," we are expressly told (Luke ii. 41); that He worked in the carpenter's shop with Joseph is highly probable. We only know that almost five-sixths of the time that the Saviour of the world was on earth was passed among the poor of the world, and passed in complete retirement. Truly this was humility.

Let us learn wisdom from our Saviour's example. Let us not "seek great things" in this world. To have a place and a title and a position in society is not so important as people think. It is a great sin to be covetous, worldly, and proud; but it is no sin to be poor. It matters not so much what money we have, or where we live, as what we are in the sight of God.

Let us daily strive to copy our Saviour's humility. Pride is the oldest and commonest of sins; humility the rarest and most beautiful of graces. For humility let us labour; for humility let us pray. Our knowledge may be scanty, our faith may be weak, our strength may be small; but if we are disciples of Him who "dwelt at Nazareth," let us at any rate be humble.

Oh, may that mind in us be formed,
Which shone so bright in Thee :
A *humble*, meek, and lowly mind,
From pride and envy free !

May we to others stoop, and learn
To emulate Thy love ;
So shall we bear Thine image here,
And share Thy throne above.

VI.

Christ found sitting among the Doctors.

ST. LUKE II. 41—52.

41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.

42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.

43 And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem : and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.

44 But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey ; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.

45 And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

46 And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of

the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

47 And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

48 And when they saw him, they were amazed : and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us ? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

49 And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me ? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business ?

50 And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

51 And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them : but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.

52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

THESE verses record the only fact which we know about our Lord Jesus Christ during the first thirty years of His life on earth, after His infancy. How many things a Christian would like to know about the events of those thirty years, and the daily history of the house at Nazareth ! But we need not doubt that there is wisdom in the silence of Scripture on the subject. If it had been good for us to know more, more would have been revealed.

The verse preceding those we have read, shows us what sort of child Jesus was. He became "strong in spirit," or showed remarkable quickness of understanding.

His mind was intent on high and heavenly things ; and He was " filled with wisdom," or extensively acquainted with the Scriptures and the works of God. Above all, " the grace of God was upon Him," or the kind favour of God : He grew up in the light of God's countenance. This one verse contains all that is known about the childhood of our Saviour ; but we learn from it that He was a wise and thoughtful child, and that He was from His birth so holy that the favour of God rested upon Him.

We are told that His parents went every year up to Jerusalem, to the feast of the Passover : as women were not required by the law to go (Deut. xvi. 16), Mary's going with Joseph shows the strength of her piety. It was a long journey from Nazareth ; about seventy miles. Twelve years old was the usual age when the Jews began more fully to instruct their children and to inure them to fasting, and probably first brought them to the Passover. It was looked upon as the commencement of their religious life ; a kind of public profession of their desire to serve God.

" When they had fulfilled the days," means, gone through all the religious ceremonies of the eight days, during which the feast lasted : the first was for the Passover feast, and the seven following, days of unleavened bread. As great numbers came to Jerusalem from every part of the country, they were accustomed for greater security against robbers on the road, to travel in large companies, carrying necessities with them. This plan is still adopted in the East, and the name for such a party of travellers is " caravan." When therefore Jesus was found absent it was natural to suppose he was with some

friends at another part of the caravan, the more so, as they were travelling with their neighbours and relatives. But after going on without Him for one day, His parents began to feel anxious, and not finding Him among their kinsfolk, they returned to Jerusalem to seek Him there.

"After three days," means—they journeyed one day, returned the second, and found the child Jesus in the temple on the third. Here He was sitting in the midst of the doctors or Jewish teachers, also called Rabbis, who were on raised seats of a semi-circular form above him, so that he and other inquirers at their feet were thus surrounded by their teachers. It was customary for any one who was present publicly to ask questions, either of the doctor who was then reading, or of any who were assembled in the synagogue, on any point on which he was not well satisfied. This synagogue, or place of assembly, was in one of the outer halls of the temple, near the entrance called Solomon's Porch. Here then they found Jesus, listening humbly to the Jewish teachers, and asking them many important questions. His parents were amazed; they could not account for His leaving them: they did not yet properly understand His Divine character; they thought He altogether belonged to them. The reply which Jesus gave proves that already He was conscious of His great work as the Saviour, and that He knew that His obedience was more due to God than to Mary and Joseph. He tells them they ought to remember why He has come into the world, and then they would see He "must be about His Father's business." A mild reproof was evidently im-

plied in that reply. It was meant to remind His mother that He was no common person, and had come into the world to do no common work. It was a solemn remembrancer that, as God, He had a Father in heaven, and that this heavenly Father's work demanded His first attention. Still all this anxiety to do His heavenly Father's will did not prevent His proper subjection to His earthly parents: He obeyed them promptly and cheerfully in every thing which did not interfere with the higher law of obedience. "He came to Nazareth, and was subject to them." The words imply a continual habit of subjection, and not a single isolated act. And as Jesus "grew in wisdom and stature, so He grew in favour both with God and man."

Let Christian boys and girls ponder these things well, and take example from the conduct of Jesus at the age of only twelve years. Let them remember that if they are old enough to do wrong, they are also old enough to do right; and that if able to read story-books and to talk, they are also able to read their Bibles and pray. Happy indeed are those families in which the children "seek the Lord early," and cost their parents no tears. Happy are those parents who can say of their boys and girls, when absent from them, "I can trust my children, that they will not wilfully run into sin."

Give us, O Jesus, ears to hear,
And hearts to understand :
Oh, may we ever find Thee near,
A Saviour nigh at hand !

Thus safely through life's rugged road,
Conducted, Lord, by Thee,
May heaven at last be our abode,
May we Thy glory see.

VII.

The Ministry of John the Baptist.

ST. MATTHEW III. 1—6.

1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judæa,

2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.

5 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judæa, and all the region round about Jordan.

6 And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

THESE verses describe the commencement of the ministry of John the Baptist, the forerunner of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a ministry that deserves close attention. Few preachers ever produced such effects as John the Baptist; none ever received such praise from the great Head of the Church. Jesus called him "a burning and a shining light." (John v. 35.) The great Bishop of souls Himself declared that "among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist." We are apt to lose sight of him who went before the face of our Lord, and to see nothing but the Lord Himself. We forget the morning star in the full blaze of the sun. And yet John's preaching arrested the attention of the whole Jewish people, and created an excitement all over Palestine. It aroused the nation from its slumbers, and prepared it for the ministry of our Lord when He appeared.

It is not probable that John began to preach long before the Saviour entered upon His ministry. Consequently, from the time mentioned at the close of the second chapter of St. Matthew an interval of about twenty-five years may have elapsed.

John the Baptist, or the Baptizer, was so called from his principal office,—that of baptizing. Preaching here means to proclaim in the manner of a public crier,—to make proclamation. The discourses recorded in the New Testament are mostly brief, sometimes a single sentence, the public announcement of some great truth. Such appears to have been the preaching of St. John,—calling men to repentance.

The scene of his preaching, the wilderness of Judæa, was along the banks of the river Jordan, and by the Dead Sea, to the east of Jerusalem. The word translated *wilderness* here does not denote, as with us, a place of boundless forests entirely destitute of inhabitants; but rather a mountainous, rough, and thinly-settled country, covered to some considerable extent with forests and rocks, and better fitted for pasture than for tilling.

There were inhabitants in those places, and even villages; but they were comparatively the unsettled portions of the country. In the time of Joshua there were six cities in what was then called a wilderness.

John preached *repentance*. This word here implies sorrow for past offences, a deep sense of the evil of sin as committed against God, and a full purpose to return from transgression, and to strive to lead a holy life. A true penitent has sorrow for sin, not only because it is

ruinous to his soul, but chiefly because it is an offence against God, and is that "abominable thing" which He hates. It is also produced by seeing that our sins have been committed against Christ, and were the cause of His death.

There are two words in the New Testament translated repentance: one denotes a *change of mind*, or reformation of life; the other, *sorrow*, or regret that sin has been committed. The former is the word used here, calling the Jews to a reformation of conduct. At this time the nation had become extremely sinful and corrupt; perhaps more so than at any preceding period. Hence both the Baptist and the Messiah began their ministry by calling the people to repentance.

The phrases, "kingdom of heaven," "kingdom of God," and "kingdom of Christ," are of frequent occurrence in the Bible. They all refer to the same thing. The expectation of such a kingdom was taken from the Old Testament writings, especially from Dan. vii. 13, 14. The Prophets had told of a successor to David who should sit upon his throne; and the Jews expected a great national deliverer.

The raiment of camel's hair in which John was clothed is a coarse, cheap cloth made from the long shaggy hair of the camel, still worn by the poorer classes in the East, and by monks. This garment, with a leathern girdle, was the usual dress of the Prophets. Locusts are flying insects, not unlike the grasshopper. They were one of the plagues of Egypt, and are very numerous in the East, where they are used as food by the poorer classes.

Palestine was famous for wild honey. Milk and honey were the chief dainties of the earlier ages, and continue to be so now among the Bedouin Arabs.

Great multitudes went to hear John's preaching from Jerusalem, Judæa, and round about Jordan, and he baptized them; thus applying an old ordinance to a new purpose. The word *baptize* here means to cleanse or wash anything in water.

Ablution was much in use among the Jews as a rite of their religion. In admitting proselytes it was significant of cleansing them from their former sins, and purifying them for the peculiar service of Jehovah. John, in calling the Jews to a new dispensation, administered the rite of baptism, or washing, to signify the necessity of their putting away sin and impurity; and thus preparing themselves for the holy reign of the promised Messiah.

Jesus gives us true *repentance*
By His Spirit, sent from heaven;
He pronounces the sweet sentence,—
"Son, thy sins are all forgiven."

Every grace, and every favour,
(Great or good, whate'er we call,
Have we only in the Saviour:
Jesus Christ is All in all.

VIII.

The Preaching of John in the Wilderness.

ST. MATTHEW III. 7—12.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance;

9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our Father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

10 And now also the ax is laid unto the root of the trees: there-

fore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:

12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

THE Pharisees were a sect among the Jews that had subsisted above a century and a half before Christ. They derived their name from a Hebrew word meaning *set apart*, because they affected to be separated by extraordinary piety from the rest of the world. They were proud and self-righteous; ostentatious as to religion,—praying at the corners of the streets, and giving alms to be seen of men. They were very particular as to external cleanliness, and practised many ceremonial ablutions; fasted twice in the week; wore broad phylacteries, or pieces of parchment, with inscriptions from the law upon them. They enlarged the fringes or borders of their garments, to be distinguished from other Jews; they sought the chief

places at feasts and in the synagogues, and were in general a corrupt, haughty, hypocritical class of men.

The Sadducees were another sect, but not so numerous. Their name was derived from Sadoc, their leader. They denied the resurrection of the dead, and the existence of angels and spirits; they rejected all traditions, and professed to receive only the books of the Old Testament, whereas the Pharisees, in addition to the written laws, held to a multitude which they maintained had come down from Moses by tradition. John addresses both these sects as a "generation of vipers," meaning that they were cunning and malignant; the viper being a kind of serpent whose bite is most poisonous.

The serpent was regarded as the symbol of cunning; also of prudence and circumspection. John the Baptist spoke plainly about sin. He taught the absolute necessity of "repentance" before any one can be saved; he preached that repentance must be proved by its "fruits;" he warned men not to rest on outward privileges, or outward union with the Church.

This is just the teaching we all need. We are naturally dead and blind and asleep in spiritual things; we are ready to content ourselves with a mere formal religion, and to flatter ourselves that if we go to church we shall be saved. We need to be told that except we "repent and are converted," we shall all perish; we need to be sent direct to Christ, the appointed Fountain of mercy, grace, life, and peace.

John expresses great humility in speaking of Him whose shoes he was not "worthy to bear;" this, among the Jews, being reckoned the most servile of all works.

The shoes, or sandals, were small pieces of wood fastened on by straps to the sole of the foot, to keep it from the sharp stones or burning sand; and were always put off when they entered a house, and put on again when they went out. To unloose or bind on these sandals was the business of the lowest servants, and their office was to carry them about for their masters. This custom is still commonly observed in the East in visits of ceremony.

John the Baptist spoke plainly about the Holy Ghost. He preached that there was such a thing as the baptism of the Holy Ghost; and that it was the special office of the Lord Jesus to give this baptism to men.

Forgiveness of sin is not the only thing necessary to salvation. There must not only be the work of Christ *for* us; but the work of the Holy Ghost *in* us. There must not only be a title to heaven purchased for us by the blood of Christ; but a preparedness for heaven wrought in us by the Spirit of Christ. The baptism of water is a great privilege; but let us never rest till we know something by experience of the baptism of the Spirit.

The *fan* was a light portable instrument, used by the Jews then, as at present, to separate the grain from the chaff. The threshing *floors* were covered at the top, but open at the sides in the day time to let the wind blow away the chaff; at night they were shut to preserve the corn from being stolen. The grain was winnowed or separated from the chaff by turning it over with a shovel, and using a fan to blow away the chaff. Thus, said John the Baptist, should the righteous be

separated from the wicked, who should one day be burned up with "unquenchable fire." Thus he spoke plainly of the awful danger of the impenitent and unbelieving.

We need to be warned that it is no light matter whether we repent or not; and to be reminded that there is an everlasting punishment for the wicked as well as everlasting life for the godly. We are apt to forget this, and speak of the love and mercy of God; but do not remember sufficiently His justice and holiness. It is no real kindness to keep back the terrors of the Lord. All who are unconverted are hanging over the brink of the pit, and may be lost for ever.

But John also spoke of the safety of true believers. He taught that there was a "garner" for all who are Christ's "wheat," and that they should be gathered together there in the day of His appearing.

The best of believers need much encouragement. They are yet in the body; they live in a wicked world; they are often tempted by the devil; they ought to be often reminded that Jesus will never leave them nor forsake them. He will guide them safely through this life, and at length give them eternal glory.

Blest Spirit, one with God above,
Thou Source of life and holy love,
Oh, cheer us with thy sacred beams,
Refresh us with Thy plenteous streams !

Oh, may our lips confess Thy name,
Our holy lives Thy power proclaim;
With love Divine our hearts inspire,
And fill us with Thy holy fire !

IX.

John Baptizeth Christ in Jordan.

ST. MATTHEW III. 13—17.

13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

14 But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?

15 And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:

17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

WE have here the account of our Lord Jesus Christ's baptism. This was His first step when He entered upon His ministry. When the Jewish priests took up their office, they were washed with water (Ex. xxix. 4); when our great High Priest begins the great work He came into the world to accomplish, He is publicly baptized.

We should here notice the *honour placed on the sacrament of baptism*. An ordinance of which the Lord Jesus Himself partook is not to be lightly esteemed. An ordinance to which the great Head of the Church submitted, ought to be ever honourable in the eyes of professing Christians.

There are few subjects in religion on which greater mistakes have arisen than baptism. Let us arm our minds with two general cautions. Let us beware, on the one hand, that we do not attach a superstitious importance to the water of baptism. We must not expect

that water to act as a charm, nor suppose that all baptized persons, as a matter of course, receive the grace of God in the moment they are baptized. To say that all who come to baptism obtain like and equal benefit,—and that it matters not whether they come with faith and prayer, or in utter carelessness,—appears to contradict the plainest lessons of Scripture.

Let us beware, on the other hand, that we do not dishonour the sacrament of baptism. It is dishonoured, when hastily slurred over as a mere form, or thrust out of sight, and never publicly noticed in the congregation. A sacrament ordained by Christ Himself ought not to be treated in this way. The admission of every new member into the visible Church, whether young or grown up, is an event which ought to excite a lively interest in a Christian assembly, and call forth the fervent prayers of all praying people. The more deeply we are convinced that baptism and grace are not inseparably tied together, the more we ought to feel bound to join in prayer for a blessing whenever anyone is baptized.

The office of John the Baptist was to prepare the minds of men for the coming of Christ. He was reluctant, therefore, to exercise his office towards the person whose messenger he felt himself to be. It was as if he said, "I require that baptism of the Holy Ghost, which Thou must dispense, and comest Thou to me, to my baptism of water only?" "Suffer it to be so now," is the answer of the Lord: "for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." This means, that it became Christ to give the sanction of His example to John's baptism, as a divine ordinance, and

one which He meant to adopt in the Gospel dispensation; and it became John, also, to comply with the request of a Being, whom he confessed to be so much mightier than himself. The descent of the "Spirit of God" like a dove, was a proof to John that Jesus was the Messiah, as we find by his own words: "I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God." (John i. 34.)

We should also notice the *peculiarly solemn circumstances* by which the baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ was attended.

We are told of the presence of all three Persons of the blessed Trinity. God the Son, manifest in the flesh, is baptized. God the Spirit descends like a dove, and lights upon Him. God the Father speaks from heaven, with a voice. In a word, we have the manifested presence of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. We may regard this as a public announcement that the work of Christ was the result of the eternal counsels of all three Persons of the blessed Trinity. It was the whole Trinity which, at the beginning of the creation, said, "Let us make man." It was the whole Trinity again which, at the beginning of the Gospel, seemed to say, "Let us save man."

We are told of a "voice from heaven" at our Lord's baptism. The "heavens were opened," and words were heard. This was a most significant miracle. We read of no voice from heaven before this, except at the giving of the law on Sinai. Both occasions were of peculiar importance. It therefore seemed good to our Father in heaven to mark both with peculiar honour. At the introduction both of the law and Gospel, "He Himself

spoke." God spake these words. (Exod. xx. 1.) How striking and deeply instructive are the Father's words! "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He declares that Jesus is the Divine Saviour, sealed and appointed from all eternity to carry out the work of redemption. He proclaimss that He accepts Him as the Mediator between God and man. He publishes to the world that He is satisfied with Him as the propitiation, the Substitute, the Ransom-Payer for the lost family of Adam, and the Head of a redeemed people! In Him He sees His holy "law magnified and made honourable." Through Him He can "be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly." (Isai. xlii. 21; Rom. iii. 26.)

These words are full of peace, joy, comfort and consolation, for all who have fled for refuge to the Lord Jesus Christ and committed their souls to Him for salvation. Such may rejoice in the thought, that though in themselves sinful, yet in God's sight they are counted righteous. The Father regards them as members of His beloved Son. He sees in them no spot, and for His Son's sake is "well pleased."

To God, who chose us in His Son,
 Ere time its course began ;
 To Christ, who left His radiant throne
 And died for wretched man ;
 To God the Spirit, who applies
 The Lamb's atoning sacrifice ;

To the eternal equal Three,
 The undivided One,
 Let saints and angels both agree
 To give the praise alone ;
 In earth, in heaven by all adored,
 The Holy, Holy Lord.

X.

Christ's Temptation in the Wilderness.

ST. MATTHEW IV. 1—11.

1 Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred.

3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,

6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning

thee: and in *their* hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

11 Then the devil leaveth him, and behold angels came and ministered unto him.

THE first event recorded in our Lord's ministry after His baptism, is His temptation. This is a deep and mysterious subject. There is much in the history of it we cannot explain; but there may be found in it practical lessons, to which we shall do well to take heed. The word "devil" means an adversary or an accuser. It is given in the Scriptures, by way of eminence, to the leader of evil angels, full of subtlety, envy, art, and hatred of mankind. He is known also by the names of Satan, Beelzebub, the Old Serpent, the

Prince of the Power of the Air. We may learn here what a *real and mighty enemy* we have in the devil. He was not afraid even to assault the Lord Jesus Himself. Three times over he attacked God's own Son. So that He who "Himself hath suffered, being tempted, is able to succour them that are tempted." (Heb. ii. 18.) The tempter first appeals to the sense of hunger,—“Command that these stones be made bread;” then to the pride of superiority,—“If thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down;” then to the love of this world's pomps and vanities,—“All these things will I give Thee,” etc. In each case our Lord replies with words taken from the Scriptures of the Old Testament. He uses such weapons of warfare as are within the reach of every one of us,—“even the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” (Eph. vi. 17.) Let us learn from this to resist firmly all temptation, by an entire reliance on God's Word and the truth of His promises. We must however remember, it is not sufficient to have the Book: we must actually read it and pray over it ourselves. It will do us no good if it only lies still in our houses. We must be familiar with its contents, and have its texts stored in our minds and memories. Knowledge of the Bible never comes by intuition: it can only be got by hard, regular, daily, attentive, wakeful reading. Do we grudge the time and trouble this will cost us? If we do, we are not yet fit for the kingdom of God.

In the fifth verse we read, that “the devil taketh Him up into the holy city.” This does not mean that he bore Him through the air, or compelled him to go

against His will, or wrought a miracle in any way to place Jesus there. It does not appear that Satan had power to do any of these things. From the original word we may gather that Satan *conducted* or accompanied Jesus to the "holy city," or Jerusalem; so called because the temple was there, and it was the place of religious solemnities.

The "exceeding high mountain" was probably some elevated place in the vicinity of Jerusalem, from the top of which could be seen no small part of the land of Palestine. It is likely that "all the kingdoms" meant the kingdoms of Palestine or the land of Canaan, and those provinces in the immediate vicinity; Judea being then (as we before said) divided into three parts, each governed by one of the sons of Herod, who were called kings: the term *world* being often used in this limited sense. Satan asserted his dominion over all these "kingdoms, and the glory of them," with considerable justice, there being an immensity of wickedness throughout the land, more particularly at that period of history; but he would willingly have given up his claim to Jesus, if He would only have fallen down and worshipped him: thus acknowledging his dependence on him rather than on God. But this bold attack met with a more decided rebuke from the Saviour, who drove him from His presence, again foiling him with the words of Scripture.

We learn then from this history, that no one is so holy as to be free from temptation; and that when God permits His people to be tempted or tried, He will also, if they look to Him, give them grace to resist and overcome.

Believers are too apt to forget this; they often find evil thoughts arising in their minds, which they can truly say they hate. Doubts, questions, and sinful imaginings are suggested to them, against which their whole inward man revolts. But let not these things destroy their peace, and rob them of their comfort. Let them remember there is a devil, and not be surprised to find him near them. To be tempted is itself no sin: it is the yielding to temptation, and the giving it a place in our hearts, which we must fear.

It was the devil who brought sin into the world at the beginning. This is he who vexed Job, deceived David, and gave Peter a heavy fall. This is he whom the Bible calls a "liar," a "murderer," and a "roaring lion." This is he whose enmity to our souls never sleeps. This is he who for nearly 6,000 years has been working at one work, to ruin men and women, and draw them to hell. This is he whose cunning and subtlety pass man's understanding, and who often appears as an "angel of light." (2 Cor. xi. 14.) Let us watch and pray daily against his devices; and remember that if we would be saved, we must not only crucify the flesh and overcome the world, but also "resist the devil."

In every dark and trying hour,
When harassed by the tempter's power,
Let this blest hope repel the dart,—
Our Saviour bears us on His heart.

Great Advocate, Almighty Friend,
On Thee alone our hopes depend;
Our cause can never, never fail,
For Jesus pleads, and must prevail.

XI.

The Beginning of Christ's Ministry. Calling of the First Disciples.

ST. MATTHEW IV. 12—22.

12 Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee;

13 And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea-coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim:

14 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying,

15 The land of Zabulon and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles;

16 The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.

17 From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent:

for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

18 And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

19 And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

20 And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.

21 And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.

22 And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

ON hearing of the outrage offered to John the Baptist, our Lord departs from the neighbourhood; thus teaching us to avoid danger when we may, as well as to meet it fearlessly when we ought. We see that our Lord began His ministry among men in the land of Galilee,—a country where the people were proverbially ignorant and blind; thus showing the Saviour's compassion in going at once and at first to preach to such poor despised sinners.

On referring to St. Luke iv. 16, it would seem that our Lord went first to Nazareth, where He had been

brought up, to proclaim the "good news;" but His townsmen cast Him out and rejected Him; and He then came and dwelt at Capernaum: thus fulfilling the prophecy in Isaiah ix. 2,—“The people which sat in darkness saw great light,” etc. This city was especially noted for its impenitence and infidelity, although our Lord spent no small part of the three years of His public ministry there, and performed many miracles; hence it was called His “own city.”

The word *Gentiles* includes, in Scripture language, all who are not Jews. It means the same as *nations*, or, as we should say, the heathen nations. From this we learn that the Gospel was intended from of old to be spread abroad among the Gentiles as well as among the Jews. The first doctrine which the Lord Jesus proclaimed to the world was *repentance*. His words were the same as those of John the Baptist. Thus we see the necessity of repentance is one of the great foundation stones which lie at the very bottom of Christianity. It is a truth which needs to be pressed on all mankind without exception. High or low, rich or poor, all have sinned and are guilty before God; and all must repent and be converted, if they would be saved.

The sea of Galilee, so often the scene of our Lord's preaching and miracles, is an inland sea or lake, and receives its name from the province of Galilee. It was also called the “Sea of Tiberias,” from a town of that name on its western shore. In Old Testament history it bears the name of “Sea of Chinnereth” (Numb. xxxiv. 11), from a city on the north-west. In the time of our Lord several well peopled towns and

villages stood on its shores, but now the borders of the lake are almost desolate, and the fish and waterfowl are but little disturbed. It was also called the Lake of Gennesaret, and is described as about fourteen miles long and six wide. Through it the Jordan passes, without mingling its blue stream. Its clear, sweet, and deep water is replenished by many rivulets, which flow into it from the surrounding mountainous regions. On every side the prospect is enchanting. Looking southward the sight is lost among distant plains, seen through a wide opening in the range of mountains: on the north-east appears Mount Hermon, with its snowy crests. Travellers say that no part of Palestine can compare in richness and beauty with the environs of Gennesaret. It must have seemed still more like a paradise in ancient times, when it was fully under cultivation. Josephus describes it as an Eden, blessed with a delightful climate, and producing all kinds of fruits in endless succession throughout the year. When agitated by the wind, the waves of the lake dash gently on the beach, skirting the waters with foam, and leaving many shells and pebbles as they retreat. On the western side the rocky shore is adorned with rose, laurel, and lilac trees. We have described this lovely lake more particularly, in order to bring before the mind the scene of our Lord's first labours, and from whence His first disciples were called,—the rock and foundation on which He built His Church. By comparing the Gospels of St. Mark (i. 16) and St. Luke (v. 2) with our text from St. Matthew, it would appear that Simon Peter (which surname signifies a *rock*) and Andrew his

brother, were the two first disciples called to be, as our Lord says, "fishers of men." Then He came to James and John, and they, like the others, immediately left all and followed Him. We see from this that there is no duty so sacred as that of following Christ. They left the very ship by which they earned their bread, and the very father whom they were dutifully assisting. Our Lord may have thus called them at the very beginning of His ministry, so that having heard all His words, and seen all His works, they might be able the better to testify of these things to the world. The religion of Christ must have been from heaven, or it never could have prospered and overspread the earth as it has done. A religion which did not flatter the rich, the great, or the learned,—a religion whose first teachers were poor fishermen, without wealth, rank, or power,—such a religion could never have turned the world upside down, if it had not been of God. Look at the Roman Emperors and the heathen priests, with their splendid temples, on the one side! Look at a few unlearned working men, with the Gospel, on the other! Were there ever two parties so unequally matched? Yet the weak proved strong, and the strong proved weak. Heathenism fell, and Christianity took its place. Christianity must have been of God.

Blest be the Lord, who comes to men
With messages of grace;
Who comes in God His Father's name,
To save our sinful race.

Hosanna, in the highest strains
The Church on earth can raise:
The highest heavens, in which He reigns,
Shall give Him nobler praise.

XII.

The Calling of Philip of Bethsaida.

Nathanael acknowledges the Divinity of Christ.

ST. JOHN I. 43—51.

43 The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.

44 Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

45 Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!


48 Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.

49 Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.

50 Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these.

51 And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

OUR Lord appears to have been journeying from Capernaum to Cana when He called His four first disciples to follow Him, as recorded in our last lecture. The day following He met with Philip, who was, like Simon Peter and Andrew, a native of Bethsaida. This was a small town in Galilee, on the western side of the Lake of Gennesaret, not far from Capernaum, where Jesus often resided. We must not mistake it with the other "city" called Bethsaida, near which the five



thousand were miraculously fed, which was on the north-eastern side of the lake.

Philip seems to have been called directly by Christ Himself, without the agency of man. Yet in faith and life He became one with those who were disciples before him. Though led by different paths they all entered the same road, embraced the same truths, served the same Master, and at length reached the same home.

The fact before us is a deeply important one. It throws light on the history of all God's people in every age and of every tongue. There are diversities of operations in the saving of souls. All true Christians are led by one Spirit, washed in one blood, serve one Lord, lean on one Saviour, believe one truth, and walk by one general rule. But all are not converted in one and the same manner; all do not pass through the same experience. In conversion the Holy Ghost 'acts as a Sovereign: He calleth every one severally as He will.

Philip appears to have instantly obeyed the call of Jesus, and to have concerned himself about the welfare of his friend Nathanael, who was a native of Cana, and supposed to be the same apostle who is elsewhere called Bartholomew, and who, like others of the twelve, had two names. Both Philip and Nathanael seem to have studied the Scriptures, and to have been familiar with their general contents. Philip thoroughly understood that "Moses and the Prophets" held forth the promise of a coming Redeemer, and that a better Priest, Prophet, and King were foretold in their writings; but he went

on to describe our Lord according to the common report about Him, as "Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph:" and this ignorant account of Christ was very likely the cause of Nathanael's doubt and prejudice, exhibited in the next verse. Nathanael's question, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" shows the low estimate in which that town was held. Nathanael, though a student of Scripture, could not remember any prophecy about Messiah coming out of Nazareth, and at once stumbled at the idea of Him whom "Moses and the Prophets" had described, belonging to such a contemptible place. Philip's reply was, "Come and see." Better counsel than this it would be impossible to conceive! If Philip had reproved Nathanael's unbelief, he might have driven him back for many a day, and given offence. If he had reasoned with him, he might have failed to convince him, or might have confirmed him in his doubts. But by inviting him to prove the matter for himself, he showed his entire confidence in the truth of his own assertion, and his willingness to have it tested and proved; and the result shows the wisdom of Philip's words. Nathanael owed his early acquaintance with Christ to that frank invitation, "Come and see." The expression of our Lord, in reference to Nathanael,—*"In whom is no guile,"*—may have referred to the thirty-second Psalm, where the character of the godly man is described. He is not only one whose iniquities are forgiven, but one *"in whose lips there is no guile."* The expression implies a true heart, a really converted man, a genuine son of Abraham by faith, as well as a son according to the flesh.

Jesus showed His omniscience in reminding Nathanael of his sitting under the fig tree. It is supposed that he was praying or holding communion with God at that time, but we are told nothing about it, and are entirely left to conjecture. Sufficient for us to understand, that when Nathanael thought he was alone, and no eye upon him, the Lord Jesus, by His Divine power of seeing and knowing all things, was perfectly acquainted with all that Nathanael said, thought, and did. His "eyes are in every place." (Prov. xv. 3.).

This Divine knowledge at once convinced Nathanael. He exclaimed, "Thou art the Son of God: Thou art the King of Israel." These words are the outburst of a heart convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. They are a noble confession that our Lord was that Divine person who was promised to come into the world to redeem sinners, and that being who was prophesied of as the future Gatherer and Ruler of the tribes of Israel.

The reply and prediction of our Lord, in the two last verses of the chapter, are remarkable. The expression, "Verily, verily, I say," is peculiar to St. John's Gospel, in which it is found twenty-five times, always at the beginning of a sentence, and always used by Christ. It is the word "Amen," twice repeated, and implies a very solemn, emphatic assertion of some great truth or heart-searching fact. No other writer in the New Testament, except St. John, ever gives the double "Amen."

There are many different views as to the prediction in the last verse, but the most satisfactory seems that which applies to events still future. Our Lord spoke

of His second coming and kingdom. When He comes the second time to take His great power and reign, the words of this text shall be literally fulfilled. The context confirms this view. Nathanael believed Jesus to be the Messiah, when He was lowly and poor. Jesus rewards his faith by assuring him that, lowly as He now seems, He shall one day come in the clouds of heaven, and reign as a King.

Our Saviour Christ will quickly come,
As lightning shines on high ;
In clouds, with power and glory great,
Be seen by every eye.

Oh, may we wait, and watch, and pray,
Look up ; and, free from fear,
Our life be all devotedness,
Till He, our Lord, appear.

XIII.

The First Miracle. Christ's Almighty Power.

ST. JOHN II. 1—11.

1 And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there:

2 And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.

3 And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.

4 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.

5 His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.

6 And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece.

7 Jesus saith unto them, Fill the

waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.

8 And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it.

9 When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was (but the servants which drew the water knew), the governor of the feast called the bridegroom,

10 And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: *but* thou hast kept the good wine until now.

11 This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.

ON the third day of His journey our Lord reached Cana. This was a small town about four miles from Nazareth; and now a neat village, called Kefr-Kenna, on a hill side, looking to the south-west, and surrounded by olive plantations. Water-pots of hard lime-stone are still used there; and some are shown to travellers which the people assert to be those which held the miraculous wine in the time of our Lord.

The marriage at Cana would seem to have been in

the family, as the mother of Jesus must have been there as a relative. She speaks to Christ and the servants as more than a guest. It is supposed that it was the marriage of Cleophas and Mary, sister to the mother of Jesus. (John xix. 25.) The marriage-feast among the Jews lasted a week, and was a season of great rejoicing. Our Lord and His disciples were invited, and by His presence sanctioned the wedding-feast. True religion was never meant to make men melancholy; on the contrary, it was intended to increase real joy and happiness. A cheerful, kindly spirit is a great recommendation to a believer: it is a positive misfortune to Christianity when a Christian cannot smile. The subject no doubt is a difficult and delicate one: on no point of Christian practice is it so hard to hit the mean between that which is lawful and that which is unlawful; between that which is right and that which is wrong. It is very hard indeed to be both merry and wise. One golden rule on the subject may be laid down, the use of which will save us much trouble: let us take care we always go to feasts in the spirit of our Divine Master, and that we never go where He would not have gone. Much good may be done in society by giving a healthy tone to conversation; let us never be ashamed to show our colours, and to make men see whose we are and whom we serve. If Christ went to a marriage-feast in Cana, there is surely something Christians can do on similar occasions. Let them only remember that if they go where their Master went, they must go in their Master's spirit.

The disciples invited to the marriage were most probably those already mentioned, who had followed Jesus, and were considered His friends and companions.

The words in the third verse are (literally translated) "wine having failed." This circumstance probably shows the poor and humble condition of those to whose marriage our Lord was invited, if we remember that the feasts on such occasions among the Jews were of several days duration, and many guests invited: this being the case, we may well understand that at the feasts of those who were not wealthy the wine might soon run short. "The mother of Jesus saith unto Him, They have no wine." She no doubt conjectured that our Lord might in some way supply the deficiency; she looked for her Son speedily to do some great miracle, and was in daily expectation that He would prove Himself the Messiah by some mighty act.

Jesus reproved her, though very gently. His words imply that she has nothing whatever to do with Christ as God: He has nothing common with her in His Divine nature. She had forgotten who and what He really was. The word "woman" does not show any want of affection: the very same expression was used by our Lord when He addressed His mother for the last time on the cross, and affectionately commended her to John's care. It might have been used on the present occasion to remind Mary of the great difference between her and Him: He was God, and she was only a human being; He the creator, she a creature.

Two things are very note-worthy in the fifth verse. One is the meekness with which the Virgin Mary submitted to the gentle rebuke which came from our Lord's mouth in the last verse. The other is the firm faith which she still exhibited in our Lord's power to work a miracle in order to supply the lack of wine, and in the probability of His working it.

The circumstance of the water-pots being filled "up to the brim," is no doubt mentioned to show that there was no room left for any imposture. What was put into the water-pots was water, and they were so filled that nothing could be infused or mingled with their contents.

The manner in which the miracle was worked deserves especial notice. We are not told of any outward, visible action which preceded or accompanied it. It is not said that He touched the water-pots containing the water that was made wine; neither that He commanded the water to change its qualities, or that He prayed to His Father in heaven. He simply *willed* the change, and it took place. We read of no prophet or apostle in the Bible who ever worked a miracle after this fashion. It is a comfortable thought that the same Almighty power of will which our Lord here displayed is still exercised on behalf of His believing people. If He "wills" their salvation, and the daily supply of all their spiritual need, they are as safe and well provided for as if they saw Him standing by them. Christ's *will* is as mighty and effectual as Christ's *deed*. The will of Him who could say to the Father, "I will that they whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am,"

is a will that has all power in heaven and earth, and must prevail. (John xvii. 24.) Happy those who believe on Him by whom this miracle was wrought. Blessed will they be in that day who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb. (Rev. xix. 9.)

Oh, heavenly Guest ! beside our gates
Though in the garb of flesh no more,
Thy loving Spirit ever waits
To bless the banquet, as of yore.

Oh thought, life's humblest walk to cheer,—
That whatso'er the morrow brings
Of dark or bright, of smile or tear,
Is hallowed by the King of kings !

XIV.

An Unclean Spirit Cast Out. Peter's Wife's Mother Healed.

ST. MARK I. 21—31.

21 And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the Sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught.

22 And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.

23 And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out,

24 Saying, Let us alone: what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.

25 And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him.

26 And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him.

27 And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him?

28 And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee.

29 And forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

30 But Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever, and anon they tell him of her.

31 And he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them.

As St. John tells us that our Lord's first miracle was performed at Cana (as related in the last lecture), we must suppose that He and His disciples returned after the marriage-feast to Capernaum, where Jesus was then residing.

On the Sabbath day our Lord went "straightway," or immediately, into the synagogue and taught the people. Synagogues were places of worship, like our churches and chapels, where the people assembled together to worship God. They were built, in imita-

tion of the temple, with a centre building supported by pillars, and a court surrounding it. In the centre building was a place prepared for the reading of the Law, which was kept in a chest or ark near the pulpit. The people sat round, facing the pulpit, and the "uppermost seats" were those nearest to it. When the Law was *read*, the person officiating rose; when it was *expounded*, he was seated. Our Saviour imitated their example, and was commonly seated in teaching the people. There were no less than 480 synagogues in Jerusalem alone, before it was taken by the Romans. The people were astonished at the doctrine or teaching of Jesus. He did not, like "the scribes," spend His time in trifling disputes and questions of no importance, but delivered the truth as became the oracles of God, teaching "as having power" (as it is in the original), and confirming His doctrine by miracles and arguments. He came with authority such as no *man* could have; and therefore it is not remarkable that the people were astonished at Him.

It is probable that the "man with an unclean spirit," mentioned in the twenty-third verse, had lucid intervals, or he would not have been admitted into the synagogue. Most likely while there one of his fits came on, and he cried out, as we see in the next verse. This man was possessed by the devil. Let us settle it firmly in our minds that there is such a being as the devil: it is an awful truth, and one too much overlooked. From the beginning of creation he has laboured to injure man: until the Lord comes the second time and binds him, he will never cease to tempt, and prac-

tice mischief. In the days when our Lord was upon earth it is clear he had a peculiar power over the bodies of certain men and women, as well as over their souls; even in our own times there may be more of bodily possession than some suppose, though in a far less degree than when Christ came in the flesh. But that the devil is ever near us, and ever ready to ply our hearts with temptations, ought never to be forgotten.

Evil spirits seem to have been acquainted at once with the Messiah, and knew that He had power over them. In this instance Jesus "rebuked" the spirit (not the man), and commanded him to come out of him, and by a word silenced the evil angel, and compelled him to leave the man whom he delighted to torment. Though still malignant he was doomed to obey; submitting because he was obliged, not because he chose. He exerted his last power, inflicted all the pain he could, then obeyed the Son of God, and came out. The people were all amazed. This power of casting out devils was to them new. It was done by a word: Jesus did it in His own name and by His own authority; proving that He was *superior* to all the unclean spirits. In consequence His fame spread throughout all the country, and the impression became prevalent that He was the Messiah. From the twenty-ninth verse we must conclude that Simon and Andrew lived together, and that our Lord, with James and John, went to their house on leaving the synagogue. Simon Peter's wife's mother being sick of a fever, they spoke to Jesus about her, no doubt imploring His help; and this was not in vain. He takes the sick woman by the hand, and lifts

her up, and "immediately the fever left her." But this was not all: a greater miracle remained behind. At once, we are told, she "ministered unto them." That weakness and prostration of strength, which as a general rule a fever leaves behind it, in her case was entirely removed. The fevered woman was not only made well in a moment, but in the same moment strong and able to work.

We may see in this case a lively emblem of Christ's dealing with sin-sick souls. The blessed Saviour not only gives mercy and forgiveness; He gives renewing grace besides. Once raised by His mighty hand from the death of sin, and washed in His precious blood, they shall go on "ministering" to Him to their life's end. There is comfort here for all who are really serving Christ, and are yet cast down by a sense of their own infirmity. Many are oppressed by doubts and anxieties, but their strength shall be according to their day. The same gracious hand which first touched and healed shall uphold, strengthen, and lead them to the last. The Lord Jesus will never lose one of His sheep. Those whom He loves and pardons, He loves to the end. Though sometimes cast down, they shall never be cast away. The healed soul shall always go on "ministering to the Lord." Grace shall always lead to glory.

Where sin and sickness dwelt
The kind Physician came;
The sufferer His compassion felt:
The deaf, the blind, the lame.

Lord, to life's utmost end
Let us this mercy know;
And own Thee as the sinner's Friend,
But sin's eternal foe.

XV.

Our Lord's Diligence in Private Prayer. He Cleanseth a Man Full of Leprosy.

MARK I. 35—45.

35 And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.

36 And Simon and they that were with him followed after him.

37 And when they had found him, they said unto him, All men seek for thee.

38 And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also : for therefore came I forth.

39 And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils.

40 And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt thou canst make me clean.

41 And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and

touched him, and saith unto him, I will : be thou clean.

42 And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.

43 And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away ;

44 And saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man : but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

45 But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places : and they came to him from every quarter.

WE may first observe in these verses that the Lord Jesus Christ, though perfectly holy, regarded the duty of secret prayer as of great importance ; also that He sought a solitary place for it, far away from the world, and even His disciples ; and that it was early in the morning, the first thing after rising : always the *best* time, when it should not be omitted. We shall find the same thing often recorded of our Lord in the Gospel

history. When He was baptized, we are told that He was "praying" (Luke iii. 21); when He was transfigured, we are told that "as He prayed, the fashion of His face was altered" (Luke ix. 29); before He chose the twelve Apostles, "He continued all night in prayer to God" (Luke vi. 12); when all men spoke well of Him, and would fain have made Him a king, we are told that "He went up into a mountain apart to pray" (Matt. xiv. 23); when tempted in the garden of Gethsemane, He said, "Sit ye here while I shall pray" (Mark xiv. 32): in short, our Lord prayed always, and did not faint. Sinless as He was, He set us an example of diligent communion with His Father. His Godhead did not render Him independent of the use of all means as a man. His very perfection was kept up through the exercise of prayer: and if He who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners," thus prayed continually, how much more ought we who are compassed with infirmity? If He found it needful to offer up supplications with strong crying and tears, how much more needful is it for us who in many things offend daily? How different was the conduct of the Saviour from those who spend the precious hours of the morning in sleep! He rose while the world was still, and joined with the universal creation in offering praise to the every where present God. As a general rule, it will be found that the religious employment through the day will be according to the state of the heart in the morning, and can therefore be measured by our faithfulness in early, secret prayer.

Our Lord does not appear to have been long left in

peace for His private devotions, as "Simon and they that were with Him, followed after Him," telling Him that the multitudes were inquiring about Him. It would seem as if Jesus had remained at Peter's house in Capernaum after His miracles of healing on the previous day, which had raised the public curiosity and anxiety to know more about them, and the disciples told Him that "all men" were seeking for Him, in order to prevail upon Jesus to appear publicly and instruct the multitudes. In answer to this, our Lord proposes to carry the Gospel to them, rather than that the people should leave their homes and follow Him. He declares that He came on earth to be a Preacher and a Teacher. He left the glory which He had from all eternity with the Father to do the work of an evangelist; He came down to earth to show to man the way of peace, to offer healing to the broken hearted, light to them that sat in darkness, and pardon to the chief of sinners, "Therefore," He says, "came I forth." In pursuance of His work He went about all Galilee, teaching and performing miracles; and being near a "certain city" (Luke v. 12), supposed to be Chorazin, though the name is not given, a leper approached Him, kneeling down before Him in token of deepest humiliation and earnest entreaty. Our Lord was probably outside the city at the time, as lepers were not permitted to come within the walls of either camp, town, or city, in fact, wherever people lived; they were by law completely separated from their fellow creatures. Leprosy is a complaint of which we know little or nothing in our northern climate: in Bible lands it is

far more common. It is a disease which is utterly incurable. It is no mere skin affection, as some ignorantly suppose; it is a radical disease of the whole man. It attacks not merely the skin, but the blood, the flesh, and the bones, until the unhappy patient begins to lose his extremities, and to rot by inches. Amongst the Jews the leper was reckoned unclean, and cut off from the congregation and the ordinances of religion. He was obliged to dwell in a separate house: none might touch him or minister to him. Here, then, we see the wondrous and almighty power of Christ. The unhappy leper came to Him, believing that He could heal him if He would; and Jesus had compassion on him, and *touched* Him, showing that He regarded him as already clean. He *willed* it, and immediately the incurable was cured. That very instant the deadly plague departed from the poor sufferer, and he was healed. Our Lord then charged the man to go at once to the priest, and present the usual offerings. There may have been several reasons for this. Jesus came to give honour to the law and to fulfil it: He did not wish that the priests should say he was usurping their privileges; it was also important to have their legal testimony as to the fact of the cure: after they had themselves pronounced the man clean, it would be impossible for them at another time to deny the reality of this miracle. The man, however, was so rejoiced at his cure, that he followed the natural dictates of his own feelings rather than the command of the Saviour, and "began to publish it much," with unseasonable zeal, so that our Lord judged it best not to enter the

city, where the crowds following Him might excite the opposition of the civil rulers. He therefore remained in the desert places, where the multitudes could come to Him without difficulty "to hear and be healed."
(Luke v. 15.)

There is a power the saints can wield
When mortal aid is vain,
That eye, that arm, that love to reach,
That listening ear to gain.

That power is *prayer* ; which soars on high,
Through Jesus to the throne,
And moves the hand which moves the world,
To bring salvation down.

XVI.

Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes.

ST. MATTHEW V. 1—12.

1 And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain : and when he was set, his disciples came unto him :

2 And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

3 Blessed *are* the poor in spirit : for their's is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed *are* they that mourn : for they shall be comforted.

5 Blessed *are* the meek : for they shall inherit the earth.

6 Blessed *are* they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness : for they shall be filled.

7 Blessed *are* the merciful : for they shall obtain mercy.

8 Blessed *are* the pure in heart : for they shall see God.

9 Blessed *are* the peacemakers : for they shall be called the children of God.

10 Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness's sake : for their's is the kingdom of heaven.

11 Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad : for great is your reward in heaven ; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

It was probably whilst our Lord remained in the "desert places," mentioned at the close of our last lecture, and the multitudes were gathered about Him from "every quarter," that He began preaching what is usually called the "Sermon on the Mount," contained in the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of St. Matthew's Gospel. We will consider for a few moments the precious truths contained in the first part, recorded in the verses we have read, and called the "Beatitudes," from each verse beginning with the word "blessed." The place from whence this sermon was preached was probably a hill, somewhere in the vicinity of Capernaum, but the precise spot is not mentioned. A mount

is still shown, a short distance to the north-west of the ancient hill of the city, which tradition reports to have been the place, and which is called on the maps the "Mount of Beatitudes." There is however no positive evidence as to this fact.

The word *disciples* means learners,—those who are taught. Here it is applied to those who attended on the ministry of Jesus, and does not necessarily imply that they were all Christians or believers.

The Lord Jesus calls those "blessed" who are "*poor in spirit*." He means the humble, and lowly-minded, and self-abased: those who are deeply convinced of their own sinfulness in God's sight; those who are content in all humility with such things as they have, and with such treatment as they receive. Humility is the very first letter in the alphabet of Christianity, and seems to be first mentioned here because selfishness and pride lie at the very root of man's transgression, and are the most powerful hindrances to his conversion.

The Lord Jesus calls those "blessed" who *mourn*: those who sorrow for sin, and grieve daily over their own short-comings; those who trouble themselves more about sin than about anything on earth. The remembrance of it is grievous unto them; the burden of it is intolerable. Blessed are all such! "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit," and a contrite heart. (Ps. li. 17.) One day they shall weep no more: "they shall be comforted." The Lord Jesus calls those "blessed" who are *meek*: those who are of a patient and contented spirit; who are willing to put up with little honour here below; who can bear injuries without resentment; who are not

ready to take offence. Like Lazarus in the parable, they are content to wait for their good things. One day they shall reign upon the earth." (Rev. v. 10.)

The Lord Jesus calls those "blessed" who *hunger and thirst after righteousness*: those who desire above all things to be entirely conformed to the mind of God. They long not so much to be rich, or wealthy, or learned, as to be holy. Blessed are all such! They shall have enough one day; they shall awake up after God's likeness, and be satisfied." (Ps. xvii. 15.)

The Lord Jesus calls those "blessed" who are *merciful*: those who are full of compassion towards others; they pity all who are suffering either from sin or sorrow, and are tenderly desirous to make their sufferings less. They are "full of good works" and endeavours to do good. (Acts ix. 36.) Blessed are all such! Both in this life and in that which is to come they shall reap a rich reward.

The Lord Jesus calls those blessed who are *pure in heart*: those who do not aim merely at outward correctness, but at inward holiness. They are not satisfied with a mere external show of religion, but strive to have always a conscience void of offence, and to serve God with the spirit and with the inner man. Blessed are all such! The heart is the man. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh upon the heart." (1 Sam. xvi. 7.) He that is most spiritually minded will have most communion with God.

The Lord Jesus calls those "blessed" who are *peace-makers*: those who use all their influence to promote peace and charity on earth, in private and in public, at home and abroad; those who strive to make all men love

one another, by teaching the Gospel which says, "love is the fulfilling of the law." (Rom. xiii. 10.) Blessed are all such ! They are doing the very work which the Son of God began when He came to earth the first time, and which He will finish when He returns the second time.

Lastly ; the Lord Jesus calls those "blessed" who are *persecuted for righteousness' sake*. He means those who are laughed at, mocked, despised, and ill-used, because they endeavour to live as true Christians. Blessed are all such ! They drink of the same cup which their Master drank. They are now confessing Him before men, and He will confess them before His Father and the angels at the last day. "Great is their reward."

Such are the eight foundation-stones which the Lord lays down at the beginning of His teaching. Eight great testing truths are set before us. May we mark well each one of them, and learn wisdom. Let us learn from them how holy and spiritually minded believers *should* be : they should never aim at any standard lower than that of the Sermon on the Mount. Christianity is eminently a *practical* religion ; sound doctrine is its root and foundation, but holy living should always be its fruit.

There is a dwelling place above ;
Thither, to meet the God of love,
The "poor in spirit" go.
There is a paradise of rest ;
For "contrite" hearts and souls distressed
Its streams of "comfort" flow.

There is a voice to "mercy" true ;
To them who mercy's path pursue
That voice shall bliss impart.
There is a sight from man concealed ;
That sight,—the "face" of God revealed,—
Shall bless the "pure in heart."

XVII.

The Lord's Prayer. The Duty of Forgiving One Another.

ST. MATTHEW VI. 9—15.

9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven.

11 Give us this day our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

13 And lead us not into tempta-

tion, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

THE assigned limits of our "Readings" will only enable us to take a portion from each of the chapters containing our Lord's Sermon on the Mount. The verses now read are few in number, but of immense importance. They contain that wonderful pattern of prayer with which the Lord Jesus has supplied His people, commonly called "The Lord's Prayer." Perhaps no part of Scripture is so well known as this. Its words are familiar wherever Christianity is found. Thousands who never saw a Bible, or heard the pure Gospel, are acquainted with "Our Father" or "Paternoster." Happy would it be for the world if this prayer were as well known in the spirit as it is in the letter!

The Lord's Prayer consists of ten parts or sentences.

There is one declaration of the Being to whom we pray ; there are three prayers respecting His name, His kingdom, and His will ; there are four prayers respecting our daily wants, our sins, our weakness, and our dangers ; there is one profession of our feeling towards others ; there is one concluding ascription of praise. In all these parts we are taught to say "we" and "our." We are to remember others as well as ourselves. .

The first sentence declares *to whom we are to pray : Our Father*. God is called a Father : first, as He is the Creator and great Parent of all ; second, the Preserver of the human family, and the Provider for their wants ; third, in a peculiar sense, the Father of those who are adopted into His family, who put confidence in Him, who are true followers of Christ, and made heirs of life. This we must never forget is the sonship that we must desire if we would be saved. Without faith in Christ's blood and union with Him, it is useless to talk of trusting in the "Fatherhood" of God. The second sentence is *a petition respecting God's name*. The word "hallowed" means to render or pronounce holy. By the "*name*" of God we mean all those attributes under which He is revealed to us : His power, wisdom, holiness, justice, mercy, and truth. By asking that they may be "hallowed," we mean that they may be made known and glorified. The glory of God is the first thing that God's children should desire. It is the purpose for which the world was created ; it is the chief thing we should seek, that "God in all things may be glorified." (1 Peter iv. 11.) The third

sentence is *a petition concerning God's kingdom*. The word "kingdom" here means *reign*. It is the expression of a wish that God may reign everywhere ; that His laws may be obeyed, and especially that the Gospel of Christ may be advanced everywhere, till the world shall be filled with His glory. It means also the *kingdom of grace* which God sets up and maintains in the hearts of all living members of Christ by His Spirit and Word. The fourth sentence is *a petition concerning God's will* ; which is, that men should obey His law and be holy. We here pray that God's laws may be obeyed by men as perfectly, readily, and unceasingly as they are by angels in heaven. Our truest happiness is *perfect submission* to God's will, and it is the highest charity to pray that all mankind may know it, obey it, and submit to it. By these three petitions being placed *first*, we learn that God's *glory* and *kingdom* are of more consequence than *our wants*, and that these should be the first in our hearts and petitions before a throne of grace. The fifth sentence is *a petition respecting our own daily wants*. The word "bread" here denotes doubtless everything necessary to sustain life. This petition implies our dependence on God for the supply of our wants. As we are dependent on Him one day as much as another, it was no doubt the intention of our Saviour that prayer should be offered *every day* ; and as it is expressed in the plural number, "*Give us*," it is intended to be used by more than one. No community can meet every day for worship but families. It is therefore evidently a strongly implied command for *daily family prayer*.

The sixth sentence is a *petition respecting our sins*. The word "debts" is here used figuratively, meaning *sins*, or the not being able to fulfil God's law. We here confess that we are sinners, and need daily grants of pardon and forgiveness. This is a part of the Lord's Prayer to be especially remembered. It condemns all self-righteousness and self-justifying. We are instructed here to keep up a continual habit of confession, also of seeking mercy and remission.

The seventh sentence is a *profession respecting our own feelings towards others*. This is the only profession in the whole prayer, and the only part on which our Lord comments and dwells when He has concluded the prayer. The object is to remind us that we must not expect our prayers for forgiveness to be heard if we pray with malice and spite in our hearts towards others. We must not expect to be forgiven if we cannot forgive. The eighth sentence is a *petition respecting our weakness*: teaching us that we are liable at all times to be led astray and to fall; instructing us to confess our infirmity, and beseeching God to hold us up, and not allow us to run into sin, and never to suffer us to be "tempted above that which we are able to bear." (1 Cor. x. 13.) The ninth sentence is a *petition respecting our danger*. We are here taught to ask God to deliver us from the evil that is in the world and within our own hearts, and from that evil one, the devil. We confess that so long as we are in the body, we are constantly seeing, hearing, and feeling the presence of evil: and we entreat Him who, alone can preserve us, to be continually

delivering us from its power. (John xvii. 15.) The tenth and last sentence is *an ascription of praise*. We here declare our belief that to our Father belongs all "power," and that He alone should receive all "glory:" and we conclude by offering to Him the profession of our hearts, that we give Him all honour and praise, and rejoice that He is King of kings and Lord of lords.

Our heavenly Father, hear
The prayer we offer now ;
Thy name be hallowed far and near,
To Thee all nations bow.

Thine then for ever be
Glory and power divine ;
The sceptre, throne, and majesty
Of heaven and earth are thine.

XVIII.

Uselessness of Profession without Practice. The two Builders.

ST. MATTHEW VII. 21—29.

21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

24 Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

25 And the rain descended, and

the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

26 And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

27 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

28 And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:

29 For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

THE Lord Jesus winds up the Sermon on the Mount by a passage of heart-piercing application. He turns from false prophets to false professors, from unsound teachers to unsound hearers. He goes on to say that many on the ground of profession will claim admittance into His kingdom; many will plead that they had done miracles, and preached or prophesied much, and will demand an entrance into heaven. The power of working miracles had no necessary connection with piety. God may as well, if He chooses, give the power of raising the dead to a wicked man, as the skill of healing to a wicked physician. A miracle is a display

of *His own power* through the medium of another. An act of healing the sick is also a display of *His power* through the agency of another. So of preaching or prophesying. God may use the agency of a man of talents, though not pious, to carry forward His purposes. As St. Paul says, though he spoke with the tongue of angels, and had the gift of prophecy, and could remove mountains, and had not *charity* or love, all would be of no avail. The day of judgment will reveal strange things. The hopes of many, who were thought great Christians while they lived, will be utterly confounded. It will then be proved that to be saved means something more than "making a profession." We must make a "practice" of our Christianity as well as a "profession." Let us often think of that great day; let us often "judge ourselves, that we be not judged" and condemned by the Lord. Whatever else we are, let us aim at being real, true, and sincere.

Our Lord then closes His sermon by a beautiful comparison, illustrating the benefit of attending to His words. It was not sufficient to *hear* them: they must be *obeyed*. He compares the man who should hear and obey Him to one who built his house upon a rock. Palestine was to a considerable extent a land of hills and mountains; therefore subject to sudden and violent rains. The Jordan, the principal river, was annually swollen to a great extent, and became rapid and furious in its course. The streams which ran among the hills, whose channels might have been dry during some months of the year, became suddenly swollen with the rain, and would pour down impetu-

ously into the plains below. Everything in the way of these torrents would be swept off. Even houses erected within the reach of these sudden inundations, especially if founded on sand or any unsolid basis, would not stand before them. Rocks in that country were common; and it was easy to secure for their houses a solid foundation. No comparison could therefore to a Jew have been more striking. So the tempests and storms of affliction and persecution beat around the soul: suddenly, when we think we are in safety, the heavens may be overcast, the storm may lower, and calamity beat upon us; in a moment, health, friends, and comforts may be gone. But if our faith is founded upon a *rock*, in time of trial it will not fail. A man's religion may have cost him trouble in time past; his foundation may have been obtained with much labour and many tears; to discover his own interest in Christ may have required many a day of earnest seeking, and many an hour of wrestling in prayer: but his labour has not been thrown away. He now reaps a rich reward. The religion that can stand trial is the true religion.

There is another point in this comparison. The house built on the sand is beat upon by the floods and rains; its foundation gradually is worn away; it falls, and is borne down the stream and destroyed. So with the man who hears Christian teaching, and never gets beyond hearing. He satisfies himself with listening and approving; but He goes no further. He flatters himself perhaps that all is right with his soul, because he has feelings and convictions and desires of a spiritual kind. In these he rests. He never really breaks off from

sin, and casts aside the spirit of the world ; he never really lays hold upon Christ ; he never really takes up the cross. He is a hearer of truth ; but nothing more.

And what is the end of this man's religion ? It breaks down entirely under the first flood of tribulation ; it fails him completely, like a summer-dried fountain, when his need is the sorest ; it leaves its possessor high and dry, like a wreck on a sand-bank,—a scandal to the Church, a byword to the infidel, and a misery to himself. Most true is it, that what costs little is worth little ! A religion which costs us nothing, and consists in nothing but hearing sermons, will always prove at last to be a useless thing.

So ends the Sermon on the Mount. In all languages there is not a discourse to be found that can be compared with it for purity, and truth, and beauty, and dignity. Were there no other evidence of the Divine mission of Christ, this alone would be sufficient to prove that He *was* sent from God. Were these doctrines obeyed and loved, how pure and peaceful would be the world ; how would anger and wrath flee ; how would peace reign in every family and nation ; how would the lost and benighted tribes of men, the poor and needy and sorrowful, bend themselves before their common Father, and seek peace and eternal life at the hands of a merciful and faithful God !

Long have we heard the joyful sound
Of Thy salvation, Lord ;
But still how weak our faith is found,
Our knowledge of Thy Word !

Great God, Thy sov'reign power impart,
To give Thy Word success ;
Write Thy salvation on our heart,
And make us learn Thy grace !

XIX.

Christ's Readiness to every Good Work. The Miraculous Draught of Fishes.

ST. LUKE V. 1—11.

1 And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret,

2 And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.

3 And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

4 Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.

5 And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.

6 And when they had this done,

they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.

7 And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

8 When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

9 For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken;

10 And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.

11 And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.

THE people were so anxious to hear our Lord, that when His Sermon on the Mount was concluded, and He was standing by the sea of Galilee, they crowded around Him to hear Him speak again. They did not think the sermon had been too long; they did not dislike to hear the truth plainly spoken: and in that sermon He *had* spoken searchingly and solemnly.

There were two ships standing close to the shore; the fishermen were not in them, but were near at hand washing their nets. One of the ships belonged to Simon Peter; and James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were

partners with him. These fishermen, we may remember, had been called by Christ, and had left their occupation and followed Him. They had accompanied their Divine Master during His missionary journey throughout Galilee (Mark i. 38), which probably occupied from three to four months; and on their return may have been directed to resume their former occupation.

As the people pressed inconveniently close, Jesus entered into Peter's ship, and prayed or requested him to thrust it a little way from the shore. We must notice that here He did not *command*, but *requested* in a humble manner. Jesus was ever in His humanity "meek and lowly." But in the fourth verse, when He spoke as a Divine Being about to work a miracle, He spoke with authority: "Launch out into the deep."

We should observe here *our Lord's unwearied readiness for every good work*. He was never tired of benefiting others. Once more we find Him preaching to a people who "pressed upon Him to hear the Word of God." And where does He preach? Not in any consecrated building, but in the open air; not in a pulpit, but in a fisherman's boat. Souls were waiting to be fed; personal inconvenience was allowed no place in His consideration: God's work must not stand still. When this second address was concluded, Jesus said unto Peter, "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught." His design was to work a miracle, which should not only confirm their trust in His Divine power, but should also furnish an emblem or visible prophecy of what their success as apostles should be. Peter answered as a disciple, calling Christ

"Master." They had been very busy during the night—the best time for fishing,—but had toiled in vain. Peter seemed to think there could not be much hope of catching any fish now, but he was willing to obey: at the Saviour's word he let down the net. We may learn a lesson from this. We may not always be able to see a *reason* for the Divine command, but our business is at once to obey. The path of duty may be hard and disagreeable: we are to go straight forward when Jesus says "Go;" and do a thing boldly, unflinchingly, and decidedly, when Jesus says "Do it." We are to walk by faith and not by sight, and believe that what we see not now to be right and reasonable, we shall see hereafter.

When the net was let down it was filled with fish; there were so many that it was actually breaking with their weight: they were obliged to ask their friends in the other ship to come and help them. There were enough fishes to fill both ships, and then they could scarcely get the vessels to shore, for they began to sink.

What made the difference between this abundance and their ill-success of the night before? The presence of Jesus, and His mighty word. We should observe here how much a *sense of God's presence abases man*, and makes him feel his sinfulness. We see this strikingly illustrated by Peter's words, when the miraculous draught convinced him that One greater than man was in his boat. "He fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." These words exactly express the first feelings of man when He is brought into anything like close contact with God. The sight of Divine greatness and holiness makes him feel strongly

his own littleness and sinfulness. Like Adam after the fall, his first thought is to hide himself; like Israel under Sinai, the language of his heart is, "Let not God speak with us, lest we die." (Ex. xx. 19.)

And here, more particularly, we see the need of a mediator; and we have in Jesus the very Mediator whose help our souls require. Through Him we may draw near to God with boldness, and cast fear away. Out of Christ, God is a consuming fire; in Christ, He is a reconciled Father. Through Christ the chief of sinners may approach God with confidence, and feel perfect peace. Our Lord spoke cheerily to His trembling disciple, and assured him he should catch men for the future. That promise, we may well believe, was not intended for Peter only, but for all the apostles, and for all faithful ministers of the Gospel who walk in the Apostles' steps. It was spoken for their encouragement and consolation, and intended to support them under that sense of weakness and unprofitableness by which they are sometimes almost overwhelmed. But God's Word shall not return void; the last day will show that no work for God was ever thrown away. When the ships reached the shore, nets, fish, ships,—all were forgotten: for the miracle had made such a deep impression on the minds of these fishermen, that they forsook all, and followed Jesus.

This God is the God we adore :
Our faithful, unchangeable Friend,
Whose love is as great as His power,
And neither knows measure nor end.

'Tis Jesus, the First and the Last,
Whose Spirit shall guide us safe home ;
We'll praise Him for all that is past,
And trust Him for all that's to come.

XX.

The Centurion's Servant Healed at Capernaum.

ST. LUKE VII. 1—10.

1 Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum.

2 And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die.

3 And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant.

4 And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this :

5 For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.

6 Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself : for I am

not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof :

7 Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee : but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.

8 For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth ; and to another, Come, and he cometh ; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

9 When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

10 And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.

OUR Lord appears to have been returning to His "own city," Capernaum, after teaching the multitudes who followed Him, in His Sermon on the Mount and other discourses, when on His way He was met by the elders of the Jews, who were the principal people in the city, and came to ask His kind help in behalf of a centurion's servant. This centurion was a commander of a hundred men, or, as we should say, a captain in the Roman army. Judæa was a Roman province, and garrisons were kept there to preserve the people in subjection. This officer was probably by birth a Pagan, but had

taken great interest in the Jewish nation and the Jewish worship. He was a rich man, for he had built a synagogue at his own expense for the accommodation of the citizens. Therefore the leading people among the Jews seemed to have had great respect for him, and willingly complied with his request, that they would ask Jesus to aid him in his trouble.

We should notice the *kindness of the centurion*. It is a part of his character which appears in three ways. We see it in his treatment of his servant. He cares for him tenderly when sick, and takes pains to have him restored to health. We see it again in his feeling towards the Jewish people. He did not despise them, as other Gentiles commonly did. The elders of the Jews bear this strong testimony, "He loveth our nation." We see it, lastly, in his liberal support of the Jewish place of worship at Capernaum. He did not love Israel "in word and in tongue only, but in deed." The messengers he sent to our Lord supported their petition by saying, "He hath built us a synagogue."

How can we account for one who was a heathen by birth, and a soldier by profession, showing such a spirit as this? There is but one way: the centurion was what he was "by the grace of God." The Spirit had opened the eyes of his understanding, and put a new heart within him. His knowledge of Divine things no doubt was very dim; but whatever light from above he had, it influenced his life, and one result of it was the kindness which is recorded in this passage.

Let us also observe the *humility of the centurion*.

Just before Jesus reached the house he sent some of his friends to meet Him. The elders had spoken of him as an important person, but he had very humble thoughts of himself. He felt unworthy to receive Christ into his house. Humility like this is one of the strongest evidences of the indwelling of the Spirit of God. We know nothing of it by nature, for we are all born proud. To convince us of sin, to show us our own vileness and corruption, to put us in our right place, to make us lowly and self-abased,—these are among the principal works which the Holy Ghost works in the soul of man. To have great gifts, and do great works for God, is not given to all believers; but all such ought to strive to be clothed with humility.

We should also notice the *centurion's faith*. We have a beautiful example of it in the request that he made to our Lord, "Say in a word, and my servant shall be healed." He thinks it needless for our Lord to come to the place where his servant lay dying. He regards our Lord as one possessing authority over diseases as complete as his own authority over his soldiers, or a Roman Emperor's authority over himself; he believes that a word of command from Jesus is sufficient to send sickness away; he asks to see no sign or wonder; he declares his confidence that Jesus is an almighty Master and King, and that diseases, like obedient servants, will at once depart at His orders.

Faith like this was indeed rare when the Lord Jesus was on earth. To see something wonderful was the great desire of the multitudes who crowded after Him.

No wonder that we read the remarkable words, "Jesus marvelled at him," and said unto the people, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." None *ought* to have been so believing as the children of those who were led through the wilderness and brought into the promised land; but the last was first, and the first last. The faith of a Roman soldier proved stronger than that of the Jews. Equally great is our responsibility. If we remain in unbelief, we are more blamable than the heathen are, who have not our advantages; besides, we are called "Christians," which means believers in Christ, therefore it is a fearful mockery to have the name without the reality, and which will receive a terrible punishment. The centurion's strong faith led to a strong cure: the servant was at once quite restored to health, and when his friends returned to the house, they found the poor dying man entirely recovered. How astonished they must have been at the great change! Not more so than many will be at that "great day" on seeing the fulfilment of Christ's promises. Let us not doubt that every word that He has spoken shall be made good. His word is a sure foundation: he that leans upon it shall never be confounded. *Believers* shall all be found pardoned, justified, and glorified at the last day. Jesus says so, therefore it shall be done.

We should also notice the *character of the servant* upon whom this miracle was performed. He must have been faithful and obedient, for he was "dear" to his master, who was as anxious for his recovery as if he had been his child. However lowly our station in

life may be, we may adorn it, and win the esteem of those above us. A good servant should do everything for God, and as in His sight, with a loving heart. The Lord Jesus himself "took upon Him the form of a servant," and we are told that there will be service in heaven. (Rev. xxii. 3.)

From all our trials, all our fears,
Thy mercy sets us free,
When in the confidence of prayer
Our souls lay hold on Thee.

In midst of dangers, fear, and death,
Thy goodness we'll adore ;
We'll praise Thee for Thy mercies past,
And humbly hope for more.

XXI.

The Widow's Son at Nain Restored to Life.

ST. LUKE VII. 11—17.

11 And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people.

12 Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her.

13 And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.

14 And he came and touched

the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.

15 And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.

16 And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people.

17 And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judæa, and throughout all the region round about.

THE wondrous event described in these verses is only recorded in St. Luke's Gospel. It is one of the three great instances of our Lord restoring a dead person to life, and like the raising of Lazarus and the ruler's daughter, is rightly regarded as one of the greatest miracles which He wrought on earth. In all three cases we see an exercise of Divine power; in each we see a proof that the Prince of Peace is stronger than the King of terrors, and that though death, the last enemy, is mighty, he is not so mighty as the sinner's Friend.

After healing the centurion's servant, the next day our Lord left Capernaum, and went to a small city not

far distant, called Nain. There is no other mention of this town in the New Testament, but its name has always been preserved. It is now a mere hamlet called *Nein*, situated on the river Kishon, about three miles south-west from Mount Tabor, at the foot of Little Hermon, surrounded by cultivated fields and verdure. Travellers have found many tombs cut out of the rock, one of which may have been the intended sepulchre for the widow's son.

Many disciples accompanied Jesus, besides a crowd of persons attracted no doubt by the report of the miracle of the preceding day. When near the gate of the city they met the sad procession. Burials were never permitted within the walls, so that all funerals took place without the gates. Many people attended it, showing sympathy and respect for the widowed mother, who mourned the loss of her only remaining comfort in life: "He was the only son of his mother." How desolate now her home: how sad her heart! There were hired mourners there, according to the usual custom among the Jews; but the poor widowed mother did not leave the lamentation to them: she was weeping bitterly. There is not an item in the whole story which is not full of misery: and all this misery, be it remembered, was brought into the world by sin. God did not create it at the beginning, when He made all things "very good." Sin is the cause of it all: "Sin entered into the world" when Adam fell, "and death by sin." (Rom. v. 12.) The world around us is full of sorrow: sickness, pain, infirmity, poverty, labour, and trouble abound on every side. Whence does it

all come? Sin is the fountain and root to which all must be traced. There would neither have been tears, nor cares, nor illness, nor death, nor funerals in the earth, if there had been no sin. We must bear this state of things patiently; we cannot alter it: we may thank God that there is a remedy in the Gospel, and that this life is not all.

We learn also in these verses how *deep is the compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ's heart*. We see this beautifully brought out in His behaviour at this funeral in Nain. He is moved with compassion, and waits not to be applied to for help. He saw the weeping mother, and knew well what her feelings must have been, for He had been born of a woman Himself. At once He addressed her with words alike startling and touching: He "said unto her, Weep not." A few more seconds and the meaning of His words became plain. Jesus touched the bier, and the bearers stood still, for they judged that He meant something very merciful and wonderful by that silent touch. Then He spoke: how strange; it was to the corpse! His words were few, but full of power. In the Old Testament we read of Elijah and Elisha raising the dead, but not by their own power, as Jesus now did. He speaks with Divine authority: "*I say unto thee, Arise.*" The corpse was not in a coffin, or in a hearse; but on a bier, which was a kind of couch, still used in those countries for the purpose. Immediately the dead man sat up and began to speak, proving how real was the miracle; for where there is speech there must be life. With the same gentle kindness Jesus did not keep

the young man conversing with Him, but at once led him to his mother. The widow's son was restored to her alive. Her darkness was turned into light; her sorrow into joy.

The crowd was awe struck. They knew that Jesus must be more than man; they called Him a "great Prophet," probably referring to Deut. xviii. 15: they regarded Christ's presence as a sign that "God had visited His people." How far they had true spiritual notions we do not know; but a great impression was made, and the minds of the people became more open to the truth about the Divinity of Christ. Let us see in this mighty miracle a pledge of that solemn event, the general resurrection. That same Jesus who here raised one dead person shall raise all mankind at the last day. When the trumpet sounds, and Christ commands, there can be no refusal or escape. All must appear before His bar in their bodies: and all shall be judged according to their works.

Let us see, furthermore, in this mighty miracle a lively emblem of Christ's power to quicken the dead in sins. In Him is life. He quickeneth whom He will; He can raise to a new life souls that now seem dead in worldliness and sin; He can say to hearts that now appear corrupt and lifeless, "Arise to repentance, and live to the service of God." Let us never despair of any soul. With Christ nothing is impossible.

Let us leave the passage with a solemn recollection of those things which are yet to happen at the last day. We read that "there came a fear on all" at Nain when the young man was raised. What then

shall be the feelings of mankind when all the dead are raised at once? The unconverted man may well fear that day: he is not prepared to meet God. But the true Christian has nothing to fear: he may lay him down and sleep peacefully in his grave. In Christ he is complete and safe, and when he rises again he shall see God's face in peace.

Jesus ! the name that soothes our fears,
That bids our sorrows cease ;
'Tis music in the sinner's ears ;
'Tis life, and health, and peace.

He speaks : and, listening to His voice,
New life the dead receive ;
The broken contrite hearts rejoice ;
The humble poor believe.

XXII.

The Storm on the Sea of Galilee Miraculously Calmed.

ST. MARK IV. 35—41.

35 And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side.

36 And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships.

37 And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full.

38 And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pil-

low : and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish ?

39 And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

40 And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful ? how is it that ye have no faith ?

41 And they feared exceedingly and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him ?

THE fame of the miracles of our Lord had no doubt greatly increased the crowd, mentioned in our last "reading," at the raising of the widow's son, and those who had friends who were afflicted brought them to be healed, as we see (Matt. viii. 16, 17), thus fulfilling the prophecy of Isa. liii. 4: "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." The evening had come, and it was desirable for many reasons that so great a concourse should quietly disperse and return home.

Jesus determined to cross the lake of Gennesareth, to the region on the eastern side, called Gadara. The disciples accompanied their Master, and other persons, not willing to part so soon with Christ, put off in "little

ships," that they also might cross the "Sea of Galilee." The *ship* in which our Lord sailed was probably a small open boat with sails, such as were commonly used for fishing on the lake, and but ill fitted to encounter a storm. They started without making any preparation for the voyage; without providing any food or raiment. This would render their danger greater, and the miracle more striking.

We may observe here, how thoroughly Jesus had taken upon Him our flesh, and was found in fashion as a man. Weary with His day's missionary labours He fell asleep, leaning against some part of the vessel,—probably the wooden railing of the ship, for the word "pillow" means any kind of support for the head. He left the rowing and steering to His disciples, who, as fishermen, were of course familiar with the navigation of the lake. Here also is a lesson for each of us: Jesus leaves to us the things which we ourselves are able to do, and expects us to do them.

A storm suddenly arose, no infrequent occurrence upon the lake of Gennesareth, and the ship was in great danger. As St. Luke tells us, the waves beat into the ship, and filled it with water. Jesus slept on through all the dangers and noise of the tempest. There was nothing to alarm *Him*. This is an emblem of the believer's peace, undisturbed by the storms of life.

The disciples were frightened. They need not have been: wherever we accompany the Saviour, we are safe. "They awoke him;" some saying, "Lord, save us;" others crying, "Master, Master, we perish;" and

some reproaching Him with indifference to their danger, "Master, carest Thou not that we perish?" according to the various accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

This shows their great distress of mind, and their earnestness in seeking to be saved. How little they knew Jesus! or else they would not have supposed that He did not care for them. We are often tempted to doubt the love of God when things seem to be against our happiness, but we must not yield to the temptation, for God does all things well, and nothing shall harm us if we are followers of that which is good. (1 Pet. iii. 13.)

Jesus awoke at His disciples' cry. The tempest had not broken His slumbers; but the prayer of the poor fishermen at once awakened Him. How ready is Jesus to listen to our prayers! How quickly they reach His heart!

The Saviour calmed the minds of the disciples before He stilled the fury of the tempest. Not even rising, but remaining in the reclining posture in which He had fallen asleep, thus manifesting His own majestic composure, He gently reprov'd His disciples for their feeble faith. They had some faith—just enough to bring them to Christ, but not enough to give them peace. While the waves were still beating into the ship, Jesus says, they ought not to be fearful. We are not always to have troubles removed, but we may always receive strength to bear them: Jesus often waits till our minds become calm and resigned, before He sends away the storm of earthly griefs. It is a great mercy to have even a *little* faith, because, if it is real

it will bring us to Christ. If we want it strengthened we must come boldly to a throne of grace. (Heb. iv. 16.)

Then Christ arose: and at His word the tempest ceased, and there was an instant calm. The placid lake showed no signs of the past storm. He speaks to the winds, and they obey Him; He speaks to the waves, and they submit to His command. His words, "Peace, be still," were the words of Him who first created all things. There could be no sublimer proof that He was truly the Son of God.

We learn from this passage that our Lord Jesus Christ is exceedingly *patient* and *pitiful* in dealing with His own people. We see the disciples on this occasion showing great want of faith, and giving way to most unseemly fears. We see our Lord dealing most gently and tenderly with them: He gives them no sharp reproof, He makes no threat of casting them off because of their unbelief; He simply asks the touching question, "Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?"

Let us mark well this lesson. The Lord Jesus is very pitiful and of tender mercy: "As a father pitieth His children, even so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." (Ps. ciii. 13.) He does not deal with believers *according* to their sins: He sees their weakness; He is aware of their shortcomings; He knows all the defects of their faith, and hope, and love, and courage.

Yet He will not cast them off: He bears with them continually; He loves them even to the end; He raises them when they fall; He restores them when

they err. His patience like His love, is a patience that passeth knowledge. When He sees a heart right, it is His glory to pass over many a shortcoming.

Let us then be hopeful about ourselves. We may be very weak, and frail, and unstable, but if we can truly say we do come to Christ and believe on Him, we may take comfort. High in heaven, at the right hand of God, Jesus is still sympathizing, still almighty, still pitiful and patient towards His people. Jesus is not changed: His heart is still the same that it was when He crossed the Sea of Galilee, and stilled the storm!

The billows swell, the winds are high,
Clouds overcast my wintry sky ;
Out of the depths to Thee I call :
My fears are great, my strength is small.

O Lord, the pilot's part perform,
And guide and guard me through the storm ;
Defend me from each threatening ill,
Control the waves : say, "Peace, be still !"

XXIII.

The Possessed of Evil Spirits Healed in the Country of the Gadarenes.

ST. MARK V. 1—13.

1 And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes.

2 And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit.

3 Who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains :

4 Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces : neither could any man tame him.

5 And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.

6 But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him,

7 And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, *thou* Son of the most

high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.

8 For he said unto him, Come out of the man, *thou* unclean spirit.

9 And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion : for we are many.

10 And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country.

11 Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding.

12 And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.

13 And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine : and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea.

THE Lord Jesus, the next morning after the tempest, arrived at Gadara : the night was spent upon the Sea of Galilee. In St. Matthew's Gospel, the "other side" to which He passed over is called the country of the "Gergesenes," while St. Luke, as St. Mark, calls it the country of the "Gadarenes;" but this difference is only apparent. Gadara was a city not far from the lake of

Gennesareth, one of the ten cities that were called Decapolis; Gergesa was a city about twelve miles to the south-east of Gadara: so that our Lord came into the region between the two cities, therefore there is no contradiction in the respective narratives. Another slight difference is also easily explained. St. Matthew says that *two* demoniacs met Jesus, while St. Mark and St. Luke speak of only *one*; but they do not say that there were *no more* than one. According to St. Matthew they were wild, fierce men, who had torn off their clothes, and broken the chains with which their friends had tried to restrain them, and had taken up their abode in the tombs cut in the rocks outside the city. They were so furious that people were afraid to pass them: and then St. Mark goes on to describe one of them more particularly, giving the most full and minute details of the three histories recorded of this mysterious miracle. This unfortunate creature had been possessed, as St. Luke tells us, a "long time," and wandered by day over the mountains, remaining among the tombs by night, crying out, tearing and cutting his flesh with sharp stones. All attempts to subdue him had been completely in vain. As soon as this demoniac saw Jesus, even afar off, he ran and worshipped Him, thus recognising and acknowledging His Divinity, and trembling at the thought of approaching judgment. It seems as if the wretched man himself were speaking these words; but it really was the unclean spirit speaking through him, and making use of his lips. To show that this was the case, Jesus asked the evil spirit for his name. "Legion" was the name of a

regiment of Roman soldiers, containing at least six thousand men; and as these soldiers had struck terror into the mind of the Jews, the very name "legion" had an alarming sound, and pointed out the number, power, and cruelty of the evil spirits that had taken up their abode in this man's soul. They were so firmly united in keeping possession, that they spoke as if they were one spirit. St. Matthew tells us that they besought Jesus not to torment them before "*the time*:" by this is meant the *day of judgment*. The Bible reveals to us that evil spirits are not now bound as they will be after that day; that they are permitted to tempt and afflict men; but that in the day of judgment *they* also will be condemned to everlasting punishment with all the wicked. These spirits seemed to know this, and to be alarmed lest the day that they feared had come.

The evil spirits desired to enter the herd of swine, either to gratify their cruelty by destroying these animals, or to hinder the Saviour's work in that locality. Their desire was granted, and the unclean spirits took possession of the unclean animals. The result was a startling and fearful picture of the *end* to which Satanic possession leads: the destruction of its victims.

We see here the *absolute power* which the Lord Jesus Christ possesses over Satan. He commanded the unclean spirits to "come out of the man," and at once the unhappy sufferer was healed. The "many devils" by whom he had been possessed were compelled to leave him. Cast forth from their abode in the man's heart, we see these malignant spirits beseeching our

Lord that He would not "command them to go out into the *deep*," as recorded in the account by St. Luke. The "*deep*" means the abyss or pit of hell, which is to become the prison of Satan and his angels. (Rev. xx. 3.) It is the same Greek word which is five times translated "*bottomless pit*" in the Book of Revelation. Mighty as these evil spirits were, they felt themselves in the presence of One more mighty; and full of malice as they were, they could not even hurt the "swine" of the Gadarenes until our Lord granted them permission.

We see also in these verses, that the *possession of a man's body* by the devil was a real and true thing in the time of our Lord's earthly ministry. Of all miracles there are none which sceptics assault so strenuously as the casting out of devils: they do not scruple to deny Satanic possession entirely. The best and simplest answer to their objections is a reference to the plain narratives of the Gospels, and especially to the one before us. The facts here detailed are utterly inexplicable, if we do not believe Satanic possession. It is notorious that lunacy, frenzy, and epilepsy are not infectious complaints, and at any rate cannot be communicated to a herd of swine: and yet men ask us to believe that as soon as this man was healed, two thousand swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, from a sudden impulse, without any apparent cause to account for their so doing! Such reasoning is the height of credulity.

Our Lord's dominion over the devil should be a cheering thought to all true Christians. Without it,

indeed, we might well despair of salvation ; but, thanks be to God, we have in Jesus an almighty Friend, who is able to “save us to the uttermost;” and who will finally triumph over Satan completely, when He shall come forth at the second advent, and bind him in the “bottomless pit.”

Welcome all by sin opprest,
Welcome all to Jesu's rest ;
Who descended from above,
Prompted by redeeming love.

He subdued the infernal powers,—
His insulting foes, and ours ;
These He from their empire drove :
Mighty in redeeming love.

XXIV.

*Christ rejected by the Gadarenes.
His commands to the man who had been possessed.*

ST. MARK V. 14—20.

14 And they that fed the swine fled, and told it in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done.

15 And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid.

16 And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine.

17 And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts.

18 And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him.

19 Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.

20 And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.

ON witnessing the wonderful miracle detailed in our last "reading," the keepers of the swine fled in consternation, amazed at the power of the Lord. These swine were doubtless owned by the inhabitants of Gadara; whether Jews or Gentiles is not certainly known. The city was not properly in the territory of Judæa; but as it was on its borders, it is probable that the inhabitants were a mixture of both Jews and Gentiles. The expression "country" would be rendered more literally "in the fields." Swine were to Jews unclean animals, and it was unlawful for them to eat them. (Lev. xi. 7.) They were forbidden by their own laws to keep them, even for the purpose of traffic.

Either, therefore, they had expressly violated the law, or these swine were owned by the Gentiles.

On hearing such extraordinary tidings, numbers of the people both of the city and country round, went out to see what had happened, and found the poor wild man clothed, peaceful, tamed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, and "in his right mind." They were awe-struck, but not converted, at the sight. It must have been strange and astonishing. The man's past history and condition no doubt were well known. He had probably been a nuisance and a terror to all the neighbourhood: yet here, in one moment, a complete change had come over him. Old things had passed away, and all things had become new.

The Gadarenes were afraid, and besought Jesus to depart out of their country. Thus they sinned against their own souls: they preferred their property to their Saviour; they loved it so much that they dreaded further losses, and were blind to the evidence of the miracle, and to the good Jesus had done in healing the miserable man. It has been remarked that these Gadarenes were an exact type of the men of this world: they saw the miraculous deliverance of a fellow-creature from Satan's power, and took no interest in it; but they saw the loss of their swine with deep concern, and cared more for that than the saving of a soul. Why, after the amazing miracle of mercy which had just been wrought among them, did these Gadarenes feel no wish to know more of Him who wrought it? Why, in a word, did they become their own enemies, forsake their own mercies, and shut the door against

the Gospel? There is but one answer to these questions: they loved the world, and the things of the world, and were determined not to give them up; they felt convinced in their own consciences that they could not receive Christ amongst them, and keep their sins also, and these they were resolved to keep. Therefore they said to Christ, "Depart from us," and were taken at their word. They were joined to idols, and are now "let alone." Let us take heed that we do not sin the sin of the Gadarenes; let us beware lest by coldness, inattention, and worldliness, we drive Jesus from our doors, and compel Him to forsake us entirely. Of all sins, this is the most sinful; of all states of soul into which we can fall, none is so fearful as to be "let alone."

Our Lord granted the request of the Gadarenes, and departed from them; but as He was entering the ship to leave their country, the healed demoniac came with *his* request that he might go with Him: but this Jesus did not see fit to grant. We can well understand the reasons for his prayer. He felt grateful for the blessed change that had taken place in himself; he felt full of love towards his deliverer; he thought he could not do better than follow our Lord, and go with Him as His companion and disciple: he was ready to give up home and country, and go after Christ. Yet strange as it appears at first sight, the request was refused: "Jesus suffered him not." He had other work for him to do. Our Lord saw better than he did in what way he could glorify God most. He did what He did in infinite wisdom, and probably for various reasons. With the Saviour's usual consideration for others, He might have

desired to restore him to his family and friends. As we may gather from St. Luke's account, this hitherto unfortunate maniac might have been born and educated in the city, and before his possession probably a man of wealth and eminence, well known, and one in whom the people felt a deep interest; therefore Jesus might have been unwilling to delay the joy of his friends, and prolong their anxiety by suffering him to remain away from them. Most likely they had not seen him for years, except under the influence of Satan. He had been as one dead to them, or worse than dead, and a constant cause of trouble, anxiety, and sorrow: here, then, was the path of duty; here was the way by which he could most glorify God. Let him go home and tell his friends what Jesus had done for him; let him be a living witness before their eyes of the compassion of Christ; let him deny himself the pleasure of being in His bodily presence, in order to do the higher work of being useful to others. Here we have a lesson for the true Christian. Home is the place above all others where the child of God ought to make his first endeavours to do good; home is the place where he is most continually seen, and where the reality of his grace ought most truly to appear; home is the place where his best affections ought to be concentrated; home is the place where he should strive daily to be a witness for Christ; home is the place where he was daily doing harm by his example, so long as he served the world; home is the place where he is specially bound to be a living epistle of Christ, so soon as he has been mercifully taught to serve God. May

we all remember these things daily! May it never be said of us that we are saints abroad, but wicked by our own fireside; talkers about religion abroad, but worldly and ungodly at home!

The passage finishes by telling us of the immediate obedience of the healed man to Christ's command. He departed, and published as he went the glad tidings of his deliverance from Satan's bondage, and thus became a testimony in his own country to the truth of the Gospel. Happy is he who is not ashamed to say to others, "Come and hear what the Lord hath done for my soul." (Ps. lxi. 16.)

How lost was our condition
Till Jesus made us whole!
There is but one Physician
Can heal the sin-sick soul.

In sin and death He found us;
He snatched us from the grave,
To tell to all around us
His wondrous power to save.

XXV.

Christ Returns to Capernaum. A Man Sick of the Palsy Cured.

ST. LUKE V. 17—26.

17 And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judæa, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was *present* to heal them.

18 And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought *means* to bring him in, and to lay *him* before him.

19 And when they could not find by what *way* they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with *his* couch into the midst before Jesus.

20 And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.

21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who

is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?

22 But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts?

23 Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?

24 But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house.

25 And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God.

26 And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to day.

THIS miracle is recorded also by St. Matthew and St. Mark, by noting the different circumstances mentioned by each evangelist, we may draw from them much information. St. Matthew tells us that Jesus acceded to the request of the people of Gadara, re-crossed the lake of Gennesareth, and returned to His "own city," which, as before mentioned, was Capernaum, at that time His home, or where He had His dwelling. Our

Lord was evidently in the habit of teaching the people while residing there, and the news of His return spread far and wide; for it brought Scribes and Pharisees, not only from the towns of Galilee, but even from the more distant Judæa. They did not, however, come with the simple desire to learn, but rather with the wish to cavil and doubt.

A threefold miracle here demands our attention. At one and the same time we see our Lord forgiving sins, reading men's thoughts, and healing a palsy. He that could do such things, and with such perfect ease and authority, must indeed be very God. Power like this was never possessed by man.

Some were present who were strong in faith. There were four men who brought a sick friend that Jesus might cure him. The poor man could not move a limb, for he was "sick of the palsy." He lay on a couch, a kind of small mattress, light, and easily rolled up. They tried to get into the house where Jesus was preaching, but could not even get into the doorway. Crowds of people filled the house, even up to the very porch; but these men were really in earnest, and when people are, they do not give up on account of difficulties. They managed to get on to the flat roof of the house, and let down the couch, with the palsied man upon it, into the *midst*, or *middle place* of the house, just in front of the Saviour. We must remember that Eastern houses are not built like ours, but in a square shape, with an open court in the middle. This court is generally paved with marble; and, if possible, a fountain of water is formed in the centre, to give it beauty and

diffuse a grateful coolness. This court is frequently covered with a thick awning, to keep out the sun, which can be easily removed or rolled up: this, then, is what is meant by "uncovering the roof." These men removed part of the awning, and then gently lowered the sick man and the couch.

When Jesus saw their faith, He did not at once satisfy it by working a cure, but He did what was of more moment: He assured the sick man of the pardon of his sins. This man was in great distress of mind, more on account of his sins than his sickness; and when our Saviour gave him comfort, it was just what he wanted, though not what his friends expected. The Jews regarded disease as the effect of sin. (John ix. 2.) It might be also the intention of Jesus to direct the minds of those around Him to the fact that suffering comes from sin, and that the most important thing was to seek its forgiveness. In this man's case we know not if any particular sin had brought on his disease, though it is a fact that intemperance sometimes produces palsy. Conscious of guilt, this man might have feared that Christ would not regard such a sinner; therefore our Lord might have assured him that his offences were pardoned, and that he might lay aside his fears. Furthermore, Jesus might be willing to show His power to forgive sins. Had he stated it without any miracle, the Jews would not have believed it, and even His disciples might have been shaken. The miracle was wrought in *express attestation* of the assertion that He had the power to forgive sins. The Scribes and Pharisees began to reason among themselves,

and in their hearts to say, "This man blasphemeth." They were right in saying that only God can forgive sins, and had Jesus been *only* man it would have been blasphemy; but He was God, and therefore spoke with Divine authority. He showed that He was Divine by answering not their words, but their thoughts. This was omniscience. He knew they were reasoning that it was easier to say, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," because no one could be a judge of the fact; as they could when He commanded the disease to go away. It was *really* a greater work to take away sin from the soul than to remove disease from the body; but that they might know that He could do both, He performed the miracle of which they could be judges, in order that it might convince them of His power as a forgiving Redeemer. He calls Himself "the Son of Man" because He was "God manifest in the flesh." In this incarnate state He was still God, and as such now exercised the Divine power of forgiving sin.

The man was healed, and so completely, that in proof of it he carried his bed with him to his own house. He was not only glad, but thankful, and glorified God as he departed. Those around were all amazed and filled with awe: they had never before seen such "strange" or wonderful things. We must hope that many believed as well as wondered, for admiration of the Saviour will not take us to heaven.

It should be a daily and habitual reflection with us that we can keep nothing secret from Christ. He ever sees us; He always knows us, and observes our acts, words, and thoughts. The recollection of this should

alarm the wicked, and drive them from their sins. It should frighten hypocrites out of their hypocrisy: they may deceive man, but they are not deceiving Christ. It should quicken and comfort all sincere believers. They should remember that a loving Master is looking at them, and should do all as in His sight. Above all, they should feel that however mocked and slandered by the world, they are fairly and justly measured by their Saviour's eye. They can say, "Thou Lord who knowest all things, knowest that I love Thee." (John xxi. 17.)

He pardons all thy sins,
Prolongs thy feeble breath;
He healeth thine infirmities,
And ransoms thee from death.

Then bless His holy name
Whose grace hath made thee whole,
Whose loving-kindness crowns thy days:
Oh, bless the Lord, my soul!

XXVI.

The Call of Levi. Christ, the Physician of Souls.

ST. MARK II. 13—22.

13 And he went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them.

14 And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphæus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.

15 And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him.

16 And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?

17 When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

18 And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?

19 And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.

20 But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.

21 No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse.

22 And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles.

WE will accompany our Lord in another of His many visits to the shores of Gennesaret. The excitement produced by the cure of the palsy had not subsided, for multitudes resorted to Him, and He taught them. Near to Capernaum was a small custom-house, where the toll was taken, either from the shipping in port, or from the merchants who passed along the high road to Damascus, which is the most ancient city now

existing, and by the Arabs numbered among the four Eastern Paradises. This city is still distinguished for its trade; so that in the time of our Lord the charge of the customs (which was the calling of Levi) must have been a lucrative post. He belonged to a class who were a very proverb for wickedness among the Jews: yet even to him our Lord says, "Follow Me;" and such mighty influence on Levi's heart accompanied our Lord's words, that although sitting at the "receipt of custom" when called, he at once left all, rose up, followed Christ, and became a disciple. This publican, or tax-gatherer, is better known by his other name, Matthew, the son of Alphæus, and afterwards the writer of the Gospel bearing his name. Like others of the Apostles, he had two names. Levi's decision was unwavering and prompt. He forsook his calling and its gains, and thus made a sacrifice greater than the other disciples had done, for they could at any time resume their occupation as fishermen. Levi "left all;" but, in the Gospel which he himself wrote, he omits the mention of his sacrifice, and simply records his becoming a follower of Jesus. St. Luke, in his account, also mentions that he "made Him a great feast in his own house;" whereas the lowly evangelist merely speaks of Jesus "sitting at meat in the house," thus marking his humility and keeping back what was for his praise. This "feast" was also partly as a grateful and public acknowledgment of his love to Jesus and determination to follow Him, and partly the taking an occasion to gather many of his fellow publicans together, that they might listen to the Saviour's teachings. He was not

ashamed of Jesus; he was no coward; he was not a disciple secretly. If Jesus is worth loving He is worth acknowledging. Most probably these men were Levi's old friends and companions. He knew well what their souls needed, for he had been one of them; he desired to make them acquainted with that Saviour who had been merciful to himself. Having found mercy he wanted them also to find it; having been previously delivered from the bondage of sin, he wished others also to be set free. This feeling of Levi will always be the feeling of the true Christian. The heart which is really taught by the Holy Ghost will always be full of love, charity, and compassion. The soul which has been truly called of God will earnestly desire that others may experience the same calling. A converted man will not wish to go to heaven alone.

The Scribes and Pharisees, when they knew that Jesus was taking part in a feast attended by tax-gatherers, were highly offended. Their pretended sanctity would not allow them to mix with such low, degraded people. How unlike Jesus! He was not ashamed to be called the "Friend of publicans and sinners." (Matt. xi. 19.) He had stooped infinitely lower in coming from heaven to save sinners, than the Pharisees could do in mixing with publicans. They would not eat and drink with them; but Jesus is willing to let poor sinners, such as we are, sit down with Him at the "Supper of the Lamb." (Rev. xix. 9.) They did not venture to speak to Jesus Himself, but they spoke murmuringly to His disciples,—against them and their Master. A little while before they had charged Him with being too

great a Person, saying, "Who can forgive sins but God only?" Now they blame Him for being too humble, eating and drinking with "publicans and sinners." They were not earnest inquirers, but wicked cavillers; yet the Saviour never turned away from even these, when there was an opportunity of saying something for their benefit. He quoted a very common proverb when He spoke of physicians being intended for the sick. He wished to convince the Pharisees of the absurdity of their objecting to the Good Physician mixing with sick people in order to cure them. He wished to teach them that this was one of His principal offices: He came to give health and cure to the dying, to heal the broken-hearted, and to offer strength to the weak. No sin-sick soul is too far gone for Him. It is His glory to heal and restore to life the most desperate cases. For unfailing skill, for unwearied tenderness, for long experience of man's spiritual ailments, the Great Physician of souls stands alone. There is none like Him.

These Scribes and Pharisees next objected against the disciples because they did not observe fasts, as the disciples of John the Baptist and those of the Pharisees did. Our Lord met this objection in a figurative manner. Jesus meant Himself as the Bridegroom. The friends who attended the marriage were called "children of the bridechamber." While Jesus was with His disciples they were full of joy. Fasting would express sorrow, which as yet they did not feel; but they did feel it when Jesus departed. (John xvi. 6—20.) In reading the twenty-second verse, it must be remem-

bered that the "bottle" here spoken of was not of glass or earthenware, but of *leather*. A similar remark applies to David's words, "I am become like a bottle in the smoke." (Ps. cxix. 83.) Unless this is kept in view, the parable is unintelligible to an English mind. New wine would ferment, and burst old skins or bottles; whereas the new ones would *yield*, and be strong enough to hold it. Our Lord meant to say there should be a *fitness* or propriety in all things, and that His new doctrines should not be connected with the old and corrupt doctrines of the Pharisees. His little flock was as yet young in grace, and weak in faith, knowledge, and experience. They must be led on softly, and not burdened at this early stage with requirements which they were not able to bear. These proverbial sayings admit of a wide application. The evils that have arisen from trying to sew the new patch on the old garment, and put the new wine into old bottles, have been neither few nor small, and have frequently done great harm in the Church of Christ.

We need not be ashamed to own
That He on whom our hopes depend,
Though now He fills the highest throne,
Was styled on earth "the Sinner's Friend."

And now, though yonder throne is His,
He bears the gracious title still;
Jesus the "Friend of Sinners" is:
He owns the charge, and ever will.

XXVII.

Our Lord's Appointment of the Twelve Apostles.

ST. MARK III. 13—21.

13 And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth *unto him* whom he would: and they came unto him.

14 And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach,

15 And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils:

16 And Simon he surnamed Peter;

17 And James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder:

18 And Andrew, and Philip, and

Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphæus, and Thaddæus, and Simon the Canaanite,

19 And Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed him: and they went into an house.

20 And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread.

21 And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself.

THE Lord Jesus Christ, during the days which He spent in the neighbourhood of the Sea of Galilee, after withdrawing from the malicious plots of His enemies, went up to a mountain (as we are told by St. Luke vi. 12), and continued all night in prayer, having no doubt especially in view the important work which on the coming day he intended to do. As soon as morning came, He called His disciples to Him, and chose twelve of them, and ordained—that is made or appointed—them Apostles. An apostle means a messenger, or one *sent forth*; and these twelve men were to become, in an especial sense, Christ's messengers of mercy to a guilty world. There are three reasons given for their ordination: viz., that they might be with

Jesus, and so receive His gracious and wise teaching ; that they might preach ; and that they might exercise miraculous powers in healing diseases and casting out evil spirits. These particular persons were selected, not on account of their goodness and cleverness, but because it was the pleasure of Jesus to choose them "whom He would."

How little we are told of the worldly position of the first ministers of the Christian Church. Four of them, we know, were fishermen : one, at least, was a publican. St. Matthew records that fact of himself in his account of these circumstances. Most of them were Galileans. Not one of them, so far as we can see from the New Testament, was great, or rich, or noble, or highly connected ; not one was a pharisee, or scribe, or priest, or ruler, or elder among the people. All were apparently "unlearned and ignorant men ;" all were poor. Let us also notice how many of the twelve who are here named had been called to be disciples before they were ordained Apostles. There were six, at least, whose first call to follow Christ is specially recorded. These six are Peter and Andrew, James and John, Philip and Matthew : in short, there can be little doubt that eleven of our Lord's Apostles were converted before they were ordained. It ought to be the same with all ministers of the Gospel. They ought to be men who have been first called by the Spirit before they are set apart for the great work of teaching others : "first converted, then ordained." None do such injury to the cause of Christianity as unconverted, worldly ministers.

Our Lord's twelve Apostles, beyond doubt, were a

distinct order of men. They had no successors when they died. Strictly and literally speaking, there is no such thing as "apostolical succession." No man can be really called a "successor of the Apostles" unless he can work miracles and teach infallibly, as they did; but we must not forget that in many things the Apostles were intended to be patterns and models for all ministers of the Gospel. Bearing this in mind, we may draw most useful lessons from this passage as to the duties of a faithful minister.

The Apostles were to *receive* power to work miracles. Their Master possessed it as His own right, showing that He was God, and they could only do as He had done through the power He was about to bestow. They were to work miracles to prove they were Apostles, to show that Christ's merciful love reaches to the body as well as to the soul, and to overthrow Satan's power, which was now shown in afflicting men.

Simon Peter's name stands first. He generally took the lead among the Apostles, not because he had any authority over them, but because he was naturally bold and ardent, and likely to put himself forward when anything was to be done; but this led him into great rashness, and caused him much sorrow. We should never rely on our own zeal, nor allow it to lead us astray. When our path is marked out by the Bible and the Holy Spirit's leadings, and we have sought the grace of Christ and are relying on Him, then our earnestness should be like a fire burning within, which many waters cannot quench. Our Lord surnamed James and John Boanerges, which is derived from the Hebrew

words meaning *sons of thunder*; probably on account of something fervid, glowing, and powerful in their genius and eloquence. Bartholomew is thought by many to be Nathaniel, of whom we read in the first chapter of St. John's Gospel. James the son of Alphæus appears to be that James whom St. Paul calls the "Lord's brother." It was this James who took the lead in the Council (Acts xv. 19), and seems to have been regarded as the chief of the Apostles at Jerusalem: he was also the writer of the Epistle which bears his name. It is remarkable that, like Matthew and Simon the Canaanite, we never read of his saying anything, or coming forward in any way, while our Lord lived: yet, after His ascension, none seems to have had so prominent a position in the Church. Judas the brother of James had three names: Jude, Lebbæus, and Thaddæus. It was he who wrote the Epistle which bears his name. Many conjectures have been made as to the meaning of Iscariot; the most probable is, that this Judas was a native of Carioth, a town of Ephraim; but nothing certain is known on the subject.

Our Lord and His twelve Apostles appear at this time to have been dwelling together in a home or house, and the multitudes gathering round them occupied so much of their time and attention that they were obliged to forego their regular meals. Our Lord's friends, most likely relatives, who heard of all that He had been doing, thought Him *beside Himself*, and wanted to remove Him from the multitude, that by absence from the *causes* of excitement, He might be restored to His right mind. Zeal about religion is too

often reckoned foolishness, fanaticism, and the sign of a weak mind. The "things of the Spirit" are always "foolishness to the natural man." (1 Cor. ii. 14.) Let it not shake our faith if we have to drink of the same cup as our blessed Lord. Hard as it may be to flesh and blood to be misunderstood by our relations, we must recollect it is no new thing. Let us call to mind our Lord's words, "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." Jesus knows the bitterness of our trials; Jesus feels for us: He will give us help.

Pour down Thy Spirit from on high ;
Lord, Thine appointed servants bless ;
Thy promised power to each supply,
And clothe them with Thy righteousness.

And when their work is finished here,
Let them in hope their charge resign ;
Before the throne with joy appear,
And there in endless glory shine.

XXVIII.

Jesus at the Passover. Irreverent Use of Holy Places Rebuked.

ST. JOHN II. 13—22.

13 And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem,

14 And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting:

15 And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables;

16 And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise.

17 And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.

18 Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?

19 Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

20 Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?

21 But he spake of the temple of his body.

22 When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.

WE will commence this "Reading" by noticing our Lord's regular attendance on the feasts and ordinances of the Law of Moses. So long as the dispensation of the Old Testament lasted He gave it all due honour, however unworthy the hands which administered it. The unworthiness of ministers will not justify us in neglecting God's ordinances. This is the first passover which our Lord attended after He entered on the work of the ministry. It is commonly supposed that He observed three others: one recorded Luke vi. 1; another, John vi. 4; and the last one, that when He was crucified,

John xi. 55. As His baptism, when He entered on His ministry, had taken place some time before this, probably not far from six months, it follows that the period of His ministry was not far from three years and a-half, agreeably to the prophecy in Dan. ix. 27. This journey, and all the circumstances which attended this visit to Jerusalem, are related only by St. John. A market was held in the temple, because the worshippers came from a great distance, and had to purchase at Jerusalem animals for sacrifice. Josephus tells us that more than two hundred and fifty thousand sacrifices were offered at one Passover. What a scene of worldly noise and disturbance must have been presented! The sellers were intent on worldly gain in the very house of God; the changers of money, or usurers, would, of course, charge for making exchanges, and thus helped to render the temple still more a "house of merchandise." When we are told that our Lord found all this going on "in the temple," we must understand that it means in the courtyards surrounding the temple,—within its precincts, and regarded as part of the temple, and therefore holy ground.

The original word for the *scourge of small cords* implies that these cords were made of twisted *rushes* or *reeds*, probably the ancient material for making ropes. This whip was made as an emblem of authority, and also for the purpose of driving from the temple the cattle which had been brought there for sale, and to assist our Lord in speedily ejecting the sheep and oxen. On no occasion during our Lord's earthly ministry do we find Him acting so energetically, and exhibiting

such righteous indignation. Nothing seems to have called from Him such a marked display of holy wrath as the gross irreverence which the priests permitted in the temple, notwithstanding all their boasted zeal for God's Law. Twice, it will be remembered, He discovered the same profanation of His Father's house going on, within three years,—once at the beginning of His ministry, and once at the end; twice we see Him expressing His displeasure in the strongest terms. "The thing is doubled" in order to impress a lesson more strongly on our minds. The distinction between our Lord's mode of dealing with each of the objects of His displeasure deserves notice. The oxen and sheep He *drove out*: there was no danger of their being lost by such treatment. The money He *threw on the ground*: it might soon be picked up and carried away. The doves He simply ordered to be *taken away*: had He done more, they might have flown away, and been completely lost to their owners. All were rebuked, and all instructed; but no one was really injured, and nothing was lost. The expression, "My Father's house," is noteworthy. It was evidently an assertion by our Lord of His Divine Sonship, and consequently of His right to vindicate the purity of His Father's place of worship. On another occasion, when our Lord called God His Father, the Jews at once said that He "made Himself equal with God." (John v. 18.) There was no resistance to His proceedings, probably because, by the Jewish Law, profaners of the temple might even be killed; because, also, the consciences of these persons would tell them they were wrong. No doubt they

were struck by the majesty of Jesus, for "He spake as one having authority." "*The zeal of thine house,*" etc., are words taken from the sixty-ninth Psalm, which is quoted no less than seven times in the New Testament as the utterance of Messiah. Our Lord's disciples seem to have "remembered" the text at the very time when He was casting out the buyers and sellers. It occurred to their minds as a striking illustration of the spirit which their Divine Master was exhibiting. He was completely absorbed for the moment in zeal for the purity of God's house. It is one among many proofs of the familiarity of the poor and unlearned Jews with the Old Testament Scriptures.

The rulers of the Jews wanted some miracle as a sign that Jesus had authority to do this. They had read of the miracles wrought by Moses, Elijah, etc., and wished for similar evidence of Christ's claims. He gave them one by referring to His resurrection. He spoke figuratively. The Jews were accustomed to this way of speaking, but they chose to suppose that Jesus referred to the temple near which He was standing. He meant the temple of His body. Believers are called a temple. (Eph. ii. 21, 22.) Herod began to rebuild the temple about sixteen years before the birth of Christ: the repairs, according to Josephus, had been going on exactly forty-six years when our Lord visited the temple; they were so extensive and costly, that eighteen thousand workmen were employed about them, and they amounted to rebuilding.

The meaning of this sentence was not understood, even by our Lord's disciples, at the time it was spoken.

It was not till "He was risen from the dead," three years after the events here described, that the full significance of the sentence flashed on their hearts. For three years it lay sleeping in their minds, like seed in a tomb, and bore no fruit; but at the end of that time the darkness passed away. They saw the application of their Master's words, and as they saw it, were confirmed in their faith. And so is it often in the present day. The good seed sometimes springs up after he that sowed it has been long dead and gone. Let preachers, teachers, and parents go on sowing the good seed of Bible truth in faith and patience. Their labour is not in vain in the Lord; their words will be remembered after "many days."

Great God, Thy sov'reign power impart
To give Thy Word success;
Write Thy salvation on our hearts,
And make us learn Thy grace.

Show our forgetful feet the way
That leads to joys on high;
There knowledge grows without decay,
And love shall never die.

XXIX.

Our Lord's Conversation with Nicodemus.

ST. JOHN III. 1—8.

1 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews :

2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God : for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old ? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born ?

5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh ; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

THIS conversation took place when our Lord "was in Jerusalem," at the time of the passover. Nicodemus was one of those who "saw the miracles which Jesus did," and was so much struck by what he saw that he sought out our Lord in order to converse with Him. He was a ruler,—one of the *Sanhedrim*, or great Council of the nation. He is twice mentioned after this, as being friendly to our Saviour: in the first instance as advocating His cause and defending Him against the unjust suspicion of the Jews (chap. vii. 50, 51); and in the second instance as one who came to aid in embalming His body. (Chap. xix. 39.) It must be remembered that the design of *John* in writing this Gospel was to show that Jesus was *the*

Messiah. To do this he here adduces the testimony of one of the *rulers* of the Jews, who early became convinced of it, and retained the belief of it until the death of Christ. The civil government of the Jews at this time was in the hands of the Romans. When Nicodemus is called "a *ruler*," it means he was a chief person among the Jews, probably in high ecclesiastical position, and certainly a famous religious teacher. It appears as if he was influenced by the fear of man, and was afraid or ashamed to visit Jesus by day; yet there came a time afterwards when this very Nicodemus took our Lord's part in open day in the Council of the Jews; and again when he was one of the only two men who did honour to our Lord's dead body. The history of Nicodemus is meant to teach us that we should never "despise the day of small things" in religion. We must not set down a man as having no grace because his first steps towards God are timid and wavering, and the first movements of his soul are uncertain, hesitating, and stamped with much imperfection: we must remember our Lord's reception of Nicodemus. He did not "break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax" which He saw before Him. It is not those who make the most flaming profession of religion at first who endure the longest, and prove the most steadfast.

The word *Rabbi* was a title of respect conferred upon eminent Jewish teachers, such as our title of *Doctor of Divinity*. It literally signifies *great*, and was used by Nicodemus doubtless because Jesus gave distinguished proofs that He came as a teacher from

God. He felt sure of this from the miracles he had witnessed, which he considered as evidences of a Divine mission. They showed that He who wrought them was no ordinary person, and ought to be listened to.

The word *verily* is an expression of strong affirmation, and is never used but in connection with some statement of great importance and solemnity. As before mentioned, in commenting upon John i. 51, it is the word *Amen* twice repeated, and is peculiar to St. John's Gospel, in which it is found twenty-five times, and always used by Christ.

We should notice in these verses what a mighty change our Lord declares to be needful to salvation, and what a remarkable expression He uses in describing it. He speaks of a *new birth*. He says to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." He announces the same truth in other words, in order to make it more plain to His hearer's mind: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." By this expression he meant Nicodemus to understand that "no one could become His disciple, unless his inward man was as thoroughly cleansed and renewed by the Spirit as the outward man is cleansed by water." To possess the privileges of Judaism, a man only needed to be born of the seed of Abraham, after the flesh; to possess the privileges of Christ's kingdom, a man must be born again of the Holy Ghost. The change which our Lord here declares needful to salvation is no slight or superficial one. It is not merely reformation, or amendment, or moral change, or outward alteration of

life: it is a thorough change of heart, will, and character; it is a resurrection,—a new creation; it is a passing from death to life; it is the implanting in our dead hearts of a new principle from above. This change of heart is rendered absolutely necessary to salvation by the corrupt condition in which we are all, without exception, born. Our nature is thoroughly fallen. Left to himself, no child of Adam would ever turn to God. This mighty change we cannot give to ourselves: a power from above must be put in exercise; even that same power which created the world. To give life is the peculiar prerogative of God. Well may our Lord declare that we need to be “born again.” We must be born of the Spirit working on our inward nature, as water works on the material body; we must have a “clean heart” created in us if we would belong to Messiah’s kingdom.

We should also notice the instructive comparison which our Lord uses in explaining the new birth. He saw Nicodemus perplexed and astonished by the things he had just heard; He graciously helped his wondering mind by an illustration drawn from “the wind.” Nicodemus had objected to the doctrine because he did not understand how it *could be*. Jesus shows him he ought not to reject it on that account, for he constantly believed things quite as difficult. It might appear incomprehensible, but it was to be judged by its effects. There is much about the wind that is mysterious and inexplicable. We cannot handle it with our hands or see it with our eyes; when the wind blows we cannot point out the exact spot where its breath

first began to be felt, and the exact distance to which its influence shall extend ; but we do not, on that account, deny its presence. It is just the same with the operations of the Spirit in the new birth of man. They may be mysterious, sovereign, and incomprehensible to us in many ways ; but it is foolish to stumble at them because there is much about them that we cannot explain. Whatever mystery there may be about the wind, its presence may always be known by its sound and effects. When our ears hear it whistling in the windows, and our eyes see the clouds driving before it, we do not hesitate to say, "There is wind." So with the Holy Spirit. Marvellous and incomprehensible as His work may be, it is a work that can always be seen and known. The new birth is a thing that "cannot be hid." There will always be visible "fruits of the Spirit" in every one that is born of the Spirit. The man born of God "believes that Jesus is the Christ," "doth not commit sin," "doeth righteousness," "loves the brethren," "overcomes the world," "keepeth himself from the wicked one." This is the man born of the Spirit. Where these fruits are to be seen, there is the new birth of which our Lord is speaking. He that lacks these marks is yet dead in trespasses and sins.

Oh, gracious Spirit, led by Thee,
How truly safe and blest are we !
Hasting the dreary desert through
With our eternal home in view.

Thou hast one theme on which to dwell, —
The story of free grace to tell ;
And while we hearken to Thy voice
We wonder, worship, and rejoice.

XXX.

The Nobleman's Son Cured. *Christ's Word as Good as His Presence.*

ST. JOHN IV. 43—53.

43 Now after two days he departed thence, and went into Galilee.

44 For Jesus himself testified that a prophet hath no honour in his own country.

45 Then when he was come into Galilee, the Galilæans received him, having seen all the things that he did at Jerusalem at the feast: for they also went unto the feast.

46 So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum.

47 When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judæa into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death.

48 Then said Jesus unto him,

Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.

49 The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die.

50 Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way.

51 And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth.

52 Then enquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.

53 So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house.

AFTER our Lord's conversation with Nicodemus, the beginning of which was the subject of our last "Reading," He and His disciples went into the country of Judæa, and baptized many; after which (as we read in the beginning of the fourth chapter) "He left Judæa, and departed again into Galilee." On His way He passed through Samaria, and had that remarkable conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well near Sychar. This caused a delay of two days on His return to

Galilee, enabling those Galileans who went to the passover to spread the fame of the miracles which they had seen Him do at Jerusalem throughout their own country. The people of Galilee were thus prepared to receive Christ. This preparation was the more needful because a prophet hath no honour in his native place. For the same reason it may be that the Saviour did not go direct to Nazareth, His "own city," as it was generally called. He went to Cana, where His first miracle had been performed. The circumstance of our Lord's going twice to Cana may be accounted for by remembering the fact that one of His disciples, "Nathanael," belonged to Cana, and that His mother, Mary, in all probability, had relatives there.

The word "nobleman" means a "royal person:" he was probably an officer of Herod's household. We know that Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, afterwards ministered to Christ. (Luke viii. 3.) It has been conjectured that it might have been her son who was ill; apparently, he was the only son. His father had come from Capernaum, leaving his son ill of a fever; and during his long and toilsome journey, for the road was up-hill all the way, he was full of anxiety lest he should reach Cana too late: the distance was about fourteen miles. The rarity of a nobleman, and a person connected with a royal court, seeking Jesus under any circumstances may be observed. It shows us that Christ will have trophies of the power of His grace out of every rank, class, and condition. In the first chapter of St. John's Gospel we see fishermen converted; in the third, a self-righteous Pharisee;

in the beginning of the fourth, a fallen Samaritan woman ; and in the end, a nobleman out of a king's court.

The forty-seventh verse shows how widely-spread was the fame of the miracle wrought at Cana on the occasion of our Lord's former visit, and how great the repute of His miracles at Jerusalem, brought back by the Galileans who went to the feast. In no other way can we account for the nobleman going to Jesus, and beseeching Him to come and heal his son. Our Lord must have had the reputation of being one who was both able and willing to work such cures.

Jesus did not give an encouraging reply : He rebuked the want of faith on the part of the nobleman and all the Galileans. They would not believe unless signs and wonders were furnished, and unless these were such as could be seen. The Samaritans had believed without seeing miracles wrought ; but the Galileans, although they had witnessed one among them not long before, were still indisposed to rest on the simple word of the Saviour. No doubt our Lord knew the heart of the man before Him. He wished to test His faith, and to draw out from him more earnest desires after the mercy that he wanted. But the nobleman was full of tender anxiety about his son : he was not to be repulsed, even though the Saviour's words did not seem encouraging ; he persists in his entreaty, and Jesus gave way to it. We may be sure that Christ will never keep us waiting for His help longer than He knows it to be kind and wise to delay. He gave the poor father even more than he asked for. The noble-

man believed the word of Christ. This was strong faith, because he had nothing but that word as proof; so he must have quickly learned the lesson Christ was teaching: viz., that we should believe simply because it is Jesus who speaks. The happy father went his way: before he reached home his servants met him with joyful tidings: he learned from their testimony how strictly true were the words of Christ. The very hour was the same as that in which Jesus had said unto him, "Thy son liveth,"—about two o'clock in the afternoon, according to the Jewish mode of computation. The fever left him suddenly and entirely; so much so, that they went to inform the father, and comfort him. It was a happy meeting when the nobleman reached home, and a holy meeting too; for he and all his household became believers in Christ.

Affliction is one of God's medicines. By it He often draws souls away from sin and the world, which would otherwise have perished everlastingly. Health is a great blessing, but sanctified disease is greater. Prosperity and worldly comfort are what all naturally desire; but losses and crosses are far better for us if they lead us to Christ. We learn also from this passage that Christ's word is as good as His presence. Jesus did not go down to Capernaum to see the sick young man, but only spoke the word: "Thy son liveth." Almighty power went with that little sentence: that very hour the patient began to amend. Christ only spoke, and the cure was done; He only commanded, and the deadly disease stood fast.

The fact before us is singularly full of comfort. It

gives enormous value to every promise of grace, mercy, and peace which ever fell from Christ's lips. What Christ has said, He is able to do ; what He has undertaken, He will never fail to make good. The sinner who has really reposed his soul on the word of the Lord Jesus is safe to all eternity. If Christ has said, "Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out," and our hearts can testify, "I have come," we need not doubt that we are saved. He of whom Jesus says in the Gospel, "He liveth," is alive for evermore.

It is the Lord, whose matchless skill
Can from afflictions raise
Blessings, eternity to fill
With ever-growing praise.

It is the Lord, our cov'nant God,
Thrice blessed be His name,
Whose gracious promise, sealed with blood,
Must ever be the same.

XXXI.

The Parable of the Sower.

ST. LUKE VIII. 4-15.

4 And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable :

5 A sower went out to sow his seed : and as he sowed, some fell by the way side ; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.

6 And some fell upon a rock ; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.

7 And some fell among thorns ; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it.

8 And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

9 And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be ?

10 And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God : but to others in

parables ; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.

11 Now the parable is this : The seed is the word of God.

12 Those by the way side are they that hear ; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

13 They on the rock *are they*, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy ; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.

14 And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of *this* life, and bring no fruit to perfection.

15 But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep *it*, and bring forth fruit with patience.

THIS parable is reported more frequently than any other in the Bible. It is of universal application. The things it relates are continually going on in every congregation to which the Gospel is preached : the four kinds of hearts it describes are to be found in every assembly which hears the Word. We transcribe St. Luke's version of it, as the whole parable is condensed in these few verses ; but it is given in greater detail

by St. Matthew and St. Mark. They both mention that the multitude gathered together was so great, that our Lord went into a ship,—that is, a boat,—and sat down to address them; He being at the sea-side,—the Sea of Galilee, or Tiberias. The multitude stood on the shore near to Him, so that He could be easily heard. From thence Jesus instructed them in parables (the thirteenth chapter of St. Matthew records no less than seven). The word parable is derived from a Greek word signifying *to compare together*, and denotes a similitude taken from a natural object to illustrate a spiritual or moral subject. It is highly probable that in this parable our Lord describes something which was actually going on within sight. Many of His parables, we must remember, were spoken in the open air, and the images, in many cases, were borrowed from subjects before His eyes: hence His lessons were seen as well as heard.

The first caution that we learn from the Parable of the Sower is to beware of the devil when we hear the Word. Our Lord tells us that the hearts of some hearers are like “the wayside.” The seed of the Gospel is plucked away from them by the devil almost as soon as it is sown: it does not sink down into their consciences; it does not make the least impression upon their minds. Nowhere, perhaps, is the devil so active as in a congregation of Gospel-hearers; nowhere does he labour so hard to stop the progress of that which is good, and to prevent men and women being saved. From him come wandering thoughts and roving imaginations, restless minds and dull memories, sleepy eyes

and fidgetty nerves, weary ears and distracted attention. In all these things Satan has a great hand. We shall always find him at church : he never stays away from public ordinances. Let us remember this and be upon our guard. Heat and cold, draughts and damp, rain and snow, are often dreaded by church-goers, and alleged as reasons for *not* going ; but there is one enemy they ought to fear more than all these things together : that enemy is Satan.

The second caution that we learn is to beware of resting on mere temporary impressions when we have heard the Word. Our Lord tells us that the hearts of some hearers are like rocky ground. The seed of the Word springs up immediately, as soon as they hear it, and bears a crop of joyful impressions and pleasurable emotions ; but these unhappily are only on the surface : there is no deep and abiding work done in their souls, and hence, so soon as the scorching heat of temptation or persecution begins to be felt, the little bit of religion which they seemed to have attained, withers and vanishes away.

It is quite possible to feel great pleasure or deep alarm under the preaching of the Gospel, and yet to be utterly destitute of the grace of God. We may be warm admirers of favourite preachers, and yet remain nothing better than stony-ground hearers. Nothing should content us but a deep, humbling, self-mortifying work of the Holy Ghost, and a heart-union with Christ.

The third caution contained in this parable is to beware of the cares of this world. Our Lord tells us the hearts of many hearers of the Word are like thorny-

ground. The seed of the Word, when sown upon them, is choked by the multitude of other things by which their affections are occupied: they have no objection to the doctrines and requirements of the Gospel; they even wish to believe and obey them; but they allow the things of earth to get such hold upon their minds that they leave no room for the Word of God to do its work: they bring no fruit to perfection. The things of this life form one of the greatest dangers which beset a Christian's path; the money, the pleasures, the daily business of the world, are so many traps to catch souls. Thousands of things, which in themselves are innocent, become, when followed to excess, little better than soul poisons and helps to hell. Open sin is not the only thing that ruins souls. In the midst of our families, and in the pursuit of our lawful callings, we have need to be on our guard. Except we watch and pray, we may live and die thorny-ground hearers.

The last caution contained in the Parable of the Sower is to beware of being content with any religion which does not bear fruit in our lives. Our Lord tells us that the hearts of those who hear the Word aright are like good ground. The seed of the Gospel sinks down deeply into their wills, and produces practical results in their faith and practice: they not only hear with pleasure, but act with decision: they repent; they believe; they obey. For ever let us bear in mind that this is the only religion which saves souls. Outward profession of Christianity, and the formal use of Church ordinances and sacraments, never yet gave man a good hope in life, or peace in death, or rest in the world

beyond the grave. There must be fruits of the Spirit in our hearts and lives, or else the Gospel is preached to us in vain. Those only who bear such fruits shall be found at Christ's right hand in the day of His appearing. Let us leave the parable with a deep sense of the danger and responsibility of all hearers of the Gospel. There are four ways in which we may hear, and of these four only one is right. There are three kinds of hearers whose souls are in imminent peril: how many of these three kinds are to be found in every congregation! There is only one class of hearers which is right in the sight of God. And what are we? Do we belong to that *one*?

Come, Thou soul-transforming Spirit,
Bless the sower and the seed :
Let each heart Thy grace inherit ;
Raise the weak,—the hungry feed ;
From the Gospel now supply Thy people's need.

Thanks we give, and adoration
For Thy Gospel's joyful sound :
May the fruits of Thy salvation
In our hearts and lives abound !
May Thy presence with us evermore be found !

XXXII.

The Woman Cured by Touching the Hem of Christ's Garment.

ST. LUKE VIII. 41—48.

41 And, behold, there came a man named Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue: and he fell down at Jesus' feet, and besought him that he would come into his house:

42 For he had one only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a dying. But as he went the people thronged him.

43 And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any,

44 Came behind *him*, and touched the border of his garment; and immediately her issue of blood stanchèd.

45 And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said, Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?

46 And Jesus said, somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me.

47 And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately.

48 And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole: go in peace.

How much misery and trouble sin has brought into the world! The passage we have just read affords a melancholy proof of this. First a distressed father in bitter anxiety about a dying daughter; then a suffering woman, who had been afflicted twelve years with an incurable disease. These are evils which God did not create at the beginning, but man has brought upon himself by the fall. There would have been no sorrow and no sickness among Adam's children if there had been no sin.

Let us see in the case of the woman here described

a striking picture of the condition of many souls. We are told that she had been afflicted with a wearing disease for "twelve years;" that she "had spent all her living upon physicians;" and that she could not be "healed of any." The state of many a sinner's heart is placed before us in this description, as in a glass. Perhaps it describes ourselves.

There are men and women in most congregations who have felt their sins deeply, and been sore afflicted by the thought that they are not forgiven and not fit to die. They have desired relief and peace of conscience, but have not known where to find them. They have tried many false remedies, and found themselves "nothing bettered," but rather worse. They have gone the round of all the forms of religion, and wearied themselves with every imaginable man-made device for obtaining spiritual health; but all has been in vain: peace of conscience seems as far off as ever. The wound within appears a fretting, intractable sore, which nothing can heal. They are still wretched, still unhappy, still thoroughly discontented with their own state; in short, like the woman of whom we read to-day, they are ready to say, "There is no hope for me: I shall never be saved."

Let all such take comfort in the miracle which we are now considering; let them know that "there is balm in Gilead" which can cure them, if they will only seek it. There is one door at which they have never knocked in all their efforts to obtain relief; there is one Physician to whom they have not applied, who never fails to heal. Let them consider the conduct of the woman before us in her necessity: when all other

means had failed, she went to Jesus for help. Let them go and do likewise.

We have here also a striking picture of the first beginnings of saving faith and its effect. We are told that she "came behind our Lord, and touched the border of His garment, and was immediately healed." The act appeared a most simple one, and utterly inadequate to produce any great result. But the effect of that act was most marvellous! In an instant the poor sufferer was healed: the relief that many physicians had failed to give in "twelve years" was obtained in one moment; it was but one touch and she was well!

It is hard to conceive a more lively image of the experience of many souls than the history of this woman's cure. Hundreds could testify that, like her, they long sought spiritual help from physicians of no value, and wearied their souls by using remedies which brought no cure. At last, like her, they heard of One who healed labouring consciences and forgave sinners, "without money and without price," if men would only come to Him by faith. The terms seemed too easy to be credible, the tidings sounded too good to be true; but, like the woman before us, they resolved to try. They came to Christ by faith, with all their sins, and to their amazement at once found relief; and now they feel more comfort and hope than they ever felt before. The burden seems rolled off their backs, the weight seems taken off their minds, light seems breaking in upon their hearts, they begin to "rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. v. 2); and all, they would tell us, is owing to one simple thing: they came to Jesus

just as they were; they touched Him by faith, and were healed. Faith in Christ is the grand secret of peace with God.

The "garment" which our Lord wore, which the suffering woman touched, was probably the square cloak which was thrown over the shoulders. This was surrounded by a border or *fringe*; and this fringe, or the loose threads hanging down, is what is meant by the *hem*. The Jews were commanded to wear this, in order to distinguish them from other nations.

Let us store up in our minds this history: it may perhaps help us mightily in some hour of need. Our faith may be feeble, our courage may be small, our grasp of the Gospel and its promises may be weak and trembling; but, after all, the grand question is, Do we really trust *only* in Christ: do we look to Jesus, and *only* to Jesus, for pardon and peace? If this be so, it is well. If we may not touch His garment, we can touch His heart. Such faith saves the soul. Weak faith is less comfortable than strong faith: weak faith will carry us to heaven with far less joy than full assurance; but weak faith gives an interest in Christ *as surely* as strong faith. He that only touches the *hem* of Christ's garment shall never perish.

Let us see, lastly, in this passage how much our Lord desires that those who have received benefits from Him should confess Him before men. We are told that He did not allow this woman to retire from the crowd unheeded. He inquired, who had "touched Him?" He inquired again, until the woman came forward and "declared" her case before all the people. And then

came the gracious words, "Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole." Confession of Christ is a matter of great importance: let this never be forgotten by true Christians. The work that we can do for our blessed Master is little and poor. Our best endeavours to glorify Him are weak and full of imperfections; our prayers and praises are sadly defective; our knowledge and love are miserably small: but do we feel *within* that Christ has healed our souls? Then can we not confess Christ before men? Can we not plainly tell others that Christ has done everything for us: that we were dying of a deadly disease, and were cured; that we were lost, and are now found; that we were blind, and now see? Let us do this boldly, and not be afraid; let us not be ashamed to let *all* men know what Jesus has done for our souls. Our Master loves to see us doing so; He likes His people not to be ashamed of His name. It is a solemn saying of St. Paul: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thy heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (Rom. x. 9.) It is a still more solemn saying of Christ Himself: "Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed." (Luke ix. 26.)

Faith lends her realizing light,
And clouds and shadows fly;
Th' invisible appears in sight,
Distinct to mortal eye.

Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
And looks to that *alone*;
Laughs at impossibilities,
And says, "It shall be done."

XXXIII.

The Daughter of Jairus Restored to Life.

ST. LUKE VIII. 49—56.

49 While he yet spake, there cometh one from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master.

50 But when Jesus heard it, he answered him, saying, Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole.

51 And when he came into the house, he suffered no man to go in, save Peter, and James, and John, and the father and the mother of the maiden.

52 And all wept, and bewailed

her: but he said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth.

53 And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead.

54 And he put them all out, and took her by the hand, and called, saying, Maid, arise.

55 And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway: and he commanded to give her meat.

56 And her parents were astonished: but he charged them that they should tell no man what was done.

THESE verses contain one of the three great instances which the Holy Ghost has thought fit to record of our Lord restoring a dead person to life. The other two instances are those of Lazarus, and the widow's son at Nain. There seems no reason to doubt that our Lord raised others beside these three; but these are specially described as patterns of His almighty power. One was a young girl, who had just breathed her last; one was a young man, who was being carried to his burial; one was a man, who had already lain four days in the grave. In all three cases alike we see life at once restored at Christ's command.

Let us learn from these verses that *rank places no man beyond the reach of sorrow*. Jairus was a "ruler

of the synagogue;" yet sickness and trouble came to his house. Jairus probably had wealth, and all the medical help that wealth can command; yet money could not keep death away from his child. Jairus had strong faith in the power of Christ to raise his child from the very brink of the grave. But this faith was severely tried, as all true faith is in every believer's case, at some time or other. The trial was in two ways.

First: he had to wait while Jesus healed the diseased woman, as recorded in our last "reading." Every moment must have seemed precious, for life was fast ebbing away, and he felt afraid that his child was even now dead. Yet Jesus stopped on the road; but we hear of no murmur of impatience. He had put his case into Christ's hands, and he left it there. It is a great thing to be able to keep our souls in patience: God often keeps us waiting to teach us patience.

Secondly: a messenger, followed by other persons from the ruler's house, brought him the sad news of his daughter's death. They advised him not to trouble the "Master" any further; showing that they thought the child was now beyond all help. This word "Master" here signifies the "Teacher." No doubt our Lord was looked upon as a great Teacher at Capernaum, where He so often taught in the synagogues. We know not how Jairus might have borne this second trial of his faith, but before there was time for despairing feelings to arise the Lord Jesus told him that, if he believed his daughter should be restored to life. "Only believe," is still the Saviour's command, both to the conscience-stricken sinner and to the afflicted saint. All things

are possible to faith. Even when all seems quite contrary to our wishes, we are to feel sure of God's power, and leave the issue to His wisdom. Nothing will make us cheerful and tranquil but an abiding sense of Christ's love, wisdom, and care over us, and Christ's providential management of all our affairs. Faith will not sink under the weight of evil tidings; faith can see light even in the darkest hour, and a needs-be for the heaviest trial. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee." (Is. xvi. 3.)


Jesus admitted only three of His disciples and the father and the mother of the damsel to go in with Him where the corpse lay. It was important that there should be *witnesses* of the miracle, and He chose a sufficient number. Five witnesses were enough to establish the fact. That she was dead, the mourners, the parents, the messengers, and the people generally, were satisfied: if she was presented to them *alive*, the proof of the miracle was complete. These three disciples—Peter, James, and John, it should be remembered, were three times singled out from the rest of the twelve apostles, and allowed to be our Lord's companions on special occasions. They were with Him on the Mount of Transfiguration and in the Garden of Gethsemane, as well as on this occasion. None of the apostles had such a clear revelation of our Lord's Divinity, our Lord's humanity, and our Lord's power and compassion towards the sorrowful and sinful. Peter was the first to confess Christ, James the first to die for Him, and John the longest labourer in His service.

"They laughed Him to scorn." The attendants and

mourners ridiculed, because they misunderstood the words of Jesus. Unbelief loses many blessings. These despisers were not suffered to witness the great miracle which was now wrought: "He put them all out." It seems a rule in Christ's dealings with men not to force evidence upon them, but rather to withhold from scorers and scoffers those proofs of His own mission which He affords to others; and as it was when He was upon earth, so it is now. The scoffing spirit is that which is most often left to itself.

Let us notice, finally, in these verses how almighty is the power of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are told that He came to the house of Jairus, and turned the mourning into joy. He took by the hand the breathless body of the ruler's daughter, "and called, saying, Damsel, arise." At once, by that all powerful voice, life was restored. "Her spirit came again, and she arose straightway." How wonderful was the change which took place in that house: from weeping to rejoicing, from mourning to congratulation, from death to life,—how great and marvellous must have been the transition! They only can tell that who have seen death face to face, and had the light of their households quenched, and felt the iron entering into their own souls,—they, and they only, can conceive what the family of Jairus must have felt when they saw their beloved one given back once more into their bosom by the power of Christ. There must have been a happy family gathering that night!

"He commanded to give her meat." This would be proof positive that her body was really alive again, and



that her parents saw no vision, but real material flesh and blood. It also affords a lesson, that believers after receiving life from Christ require to have that life constantly sustained, and should therefore use the various means of grace wherein they may feed on Christ by faith with thanksgiving.

Let us leave the passage with the consoling thought that the things which happened in Jairus' house are a type of good things to come. The hour cometh, and will soon be here, when the voice of Christ shall call all His people from their graves, and gather them together to part no more. Christ shall unite the whole family in the great home in heaven, and all tears shall be wiped from all eyes!

“A little while,” our Lord shall come,
And we shall wander here no more ;
He'll take us to our Father's home,
Where He for us hath gone before,
To dwell with Him, to see His face,
And sing the glories of His grace.

“A little while,” He'll come again !
Let us the precious hours redeem ;
Our only grief to give Him pain,
Our joy to serve and follow Him.
Watching and ready may we be,
As those who long their Lord to see.

XXXIV.

Sight Restored to Two Blind Men. Dumb Demoniac Cured.

ST. MATTHEW IX. 27—38.

27 And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying and saying, *Thou* son of David, have mercy on us.

28 And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord.

29 Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you.

30 And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See *that* no man know *it*.

31 But they, when they were departed, spread abroad his fame in all that country.

32 As they went out, behold they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil.

33 And when the devil was cast

out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel.

34 But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils.

35 And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

36 But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

37 Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers *are* few;

38 Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

THIS miracle of our Lord's restoring these two blind men to sight is found only in St. Matthew's Gospel. They were probably waiting for Jesus to leave the ruler's house, after restoring his little daughter to life, as related in our last "reading." These blind men addressed our Lord as, "Son of David,"—a title generally used by the Jews in speaking of the Messiah as *the* Son or Descendant of David, by way of eminence;

so that, applied to Christ, it was an acknowledgment of His claim to be the Messiah. We see from this that strong faith in Christ may sometimes be found where least it might have been expected. Who would have thought that two blind men would have called our Lord the "Son of David"? They could not of course have seen the miracles which He did: they could only know Him by common report. But the eyes of their understanding were enlightened, if their bodily eyes were dark; they saw the truth which Scribes and Pharisees could not see: they saw that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah; they believed that He was able to heal them.

These blind men asked for mercy: they had no right or claim to the Saviour's help; they could only rest on the compassion of Jesus. He is full of mercy and tender love; yet on this occasion He was pleased to try the faith of these men. He seemed deaf to their cry: but they were earnest, and persevered, following Christ into His house. We must remember that all these miracles we have lately mentioned took place at Capernaum, where our Lord had a temporary home with His disciples. These blind men came voluntarily to Jesus, who did not ask them what they required, for He knew that the greatest blessing to them would be sight; but He asked them if they really believed He could cure them. This inquiry might have been for two reasons: first, to honour faith; secondly, to give these men an opportunity of glorifying Him by the declaration of their faith. Their answer was in few words. Talkative people are not always the most

earnest in religion. But though the words of these men were few, they were decided. Their faith had no wavering about it: according to their faith so was the blessing. The touch of Jesus now gave sight, as it had just given life to the ruler's daughter, and their eyes were immediately opened. As at the completion of the former miracles, Jesus charged them to keep it secret; but these men allowed their gratitude to overcome their obedience: this was natural, but wrong. Our love for Jesus and our anxiety for His glory should always run in the way of His commandments. We may note here, as in many places, how little our Lord desired publicity. To do great works and say nothing about them, to work powerfully, and yet noiselessly and quietly, is to walk in Christ's steps. The shallowest streams and emptiest vessels make most noise.

As the blind men were going out, people were bringing in a dumb demoniac; and again our Lord gave proof of His power in casting out the devil. We are told "the multitudes marvelled;" and the Pharisees thought it necessary to account in some way for the working of such manifest miracles. They knew they must acknowledge that they were wrought by *superhuman* power, and therefore ascribed it to the prince of the devils,—to Beelzebub,—as we find in a similar passage in the twelfth chapter twenty-fourth verse. This was designed to throw all possible contempt on Jesus; Beelzebub being an opprobrious name given to the worst and vilest even of the devils.

From the thirty-fifth verse we may learn that our Lord had great experience of disease and sickness.

He went about "doing good;" He was an eye witness of all the ills that flesh is heir to; He saw ailments of every kind, sort, and description; He was brought in contact with every form of bodily suffering. None were too loathsome for Him to attend to; none were too frightful for Him to cure. There is much comfort to be drawn from this fact. The Great High Priest, to whom we must apply for pardon and peace with God, is eminently qualified to sympathize with an aching body as well as to heal an aching conscience. The eyes of Him who is King of kings used often to look with pity on the diseased. The world cares little for the sick, and often keeps aloof from them; but the Lord Jesus is the first to visit them, and say, "I stand at the door and knock." (Rev. iii. 20.)

Let us also notice our Lord's tender concern for neglected souls. "He saw multitudes" scattered about like "sheep having no shepherd," and He was moved with compassion. He saw them neglected by those who, for the time, ought to have been teachers; He saw them ignorant, hopeless, helpless, dying, and unfit to die: the sight moved Him to deep pity. If we would be like Christ we should partake of such feelings. The man who does not care for the souls of all unconverted persons can surely not have the "mind of Christ." (1 Cor. ii. 16.)

Let us also learn that there is a solemn duty incumbent on all Christians who would do good to the unconverted part of the world: they are to pray for more men to be raised up to work for the conversion of souls. Let us make it a point of conscience never

to forget this solemn charge of our Lord's. By prayer we obtain the aid of the Holy Spirit, who alone can make ministers of the Gospel, and raise up lay workmen in the spiritual harvest. By prayer we reach Him without whom work and money alike are vain.

Lord of the Gospel harvest ! send
More labourers forth into Thy field :
More pastors teach, Thy flock to tend,
More workmen raise, Thy house to build.
His work and place to each assign,
And clothe their word with power divine.

XXXV.

The Message of John the Baptist. Christ's Testimony concerning him.

ST. MATTHEW XI. 2—15.

2 Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples,

3 And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

4 Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see:

5 The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

6 And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

7 And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?

8 But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing

are in king's houses.

9 But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.

10 For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

11 Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

14 And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.

15 He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

OUR Lord still continued teaching and preaching in the cities near Capernaum and in Galilee. He did not yet go into Judæa; but the fame of His miracles had reached John the Baptist, who had been cast into prison for his faithful boldness in reproving Herod. (Luke iii. 19.) John sent two of his disciples to ask our Lord a very important question: "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" That

is, Art Thou the Messiah, or the Christ? The Jews expected a Saviour: His coming had been long foretold. In common language, therefore, He was familiarly described as *He that was to come*. John, no doubt, sent to ask this question for the benefit of His disciples. It was meant to give them an opportunity of hearing from Christ's own lips the evidence of His Divine mission. John the Baptist doubtless felt his own ministry was ended. Something within him told him that he would never come forth from Herod's prison-house, but would surely die. He remembered the ignorant jealousies that had already been shown by his disciples towards the disciples of Christ: he took the most likely course to dispel those jealousies for ever. Even in these dark days we see this holy man maintaining his old ground as a witness to Christ. He is the same man that he was when he cried, "Behold the Lamb of God." To testify of Christ was his continual work as a preacher at liberty; to send men to Christ was one of his last works as a prisoner in chains. The conduct of John the Baptist in this matter affords a striking example to ministers, teachers, and parents when they draw near the end of their course. Their chief concern should be about the souls of those they are going to leave behind them; their great desire should be to persuade them to cleave to Christ. The death of those who have guided and instructed us on earth ought always to have this effect. It should make us lay hold more firmly on Him who dieth no more, "continueth ever," and "hath an unchangeable priesthood." (Heb. vii. 24.)


We should mark the peculiar answer which the disciples of John received from our Lord. In the account given by St. Luke (vii. 21) we are told that "in the same hour He cured many of their infirmities and plagues:" and then "He said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard." He makes no formal declaration that He is the Messiah that was to come; He simply supplies the messengers with facts to repeat to their master, and sends them away. He knew well how John the Baptist would employ these facts. He would say to his disciples, "Behold in Him who worked these miracles the Prophet greater than Moses. This is He whom you must hear and follow when I am dead: this is indeed the Christ."

Let us mark also the solemn warning which our Lord gave to John's disciples. He knew the danger in which they were; He knew that they were disposed to question His claim to be the Messiah, because of His lowly appearance. They saw no signs of a king about Him,—no riches, no royal apparel, no guard, no courtiers, and no crown; they only saw a man, to all appearance poor as any one of themselves, attended by a few fishermen and publicans. Their pride rebelled at such a one as this being the Christ. It seemed incredible: there must be some mistake. Such thoughts as these, in all probability, passed through their minds. Our Lord read their hearts, and dismissed them with a searching caution: "Blessed," He said, "is he that is not offended in Me."

We must also notice in this passage the high testimony which our Lord bears to the character of John

the Baptist. No mortal man ever received such commendation as Jesus here bestows on His imprisoned friend. In time past John had boldly confessed Jesus before men as the Lamb of God: now Jesus openly declares John to be more than a prophet. He saw that the people around Him were apt to think lightly of John, partly because he was in prison, partly because of the inquiry which his disciples had just brought; He bids His hearers dismiss from their minds their unworthy doubts and suspicions about this holy man; He tells them John was no wavering and unstable character,—a mere reed shaken by the wind. The region of country in which John preached being annually overflowed by the Jordan, produced great quantities of *reeds*, or *canes* of a light fragile nature, easily shaken by the wind: this was, therefore, a suitable image of a light, changing, inconstant man. Our Lord tells His hearers that John was no mere courtier and hanger on about king's palaces, though circumstances at the end of his ministry had brought him into connection with King Herod. He winds up His testimony by the remarkable saying, that "among those that are born of woman, there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist."

There is something deeply touching in these sayings of our Lord on behalf of His absent servant. The position which John now occupied as Herod's prisoner was widely different from that which he occupied at the beginning of his ministry. At one time he was the best known and most popular preacher of his day. There was a time when "there went out to him Jeru-



saalem and all Judæa, and were baptizeded in Jordan." (Matt. iii. 5.) Now he was a solitary prisoner in Herod's hands,—deserted, friendless, and with nothing before him but death; but the want of man's favour is no proof that God is displeased. John the Baptist had one Friend who never failed him and never forsook him,—a Friend whose kindness did not ebb and flow like John's popularity, but was always the same. That Friend was our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is comfort here for all believers who are suspected, slandered, and falsely accused. Few are the children of God who do not suffer in this way at some time or other. Let all who are assaulted in their characters rest in the thought that they have an Advocate in heaven who knows their sorrows. That same Jesus who maintained the character of His imprisoned servant before a Jewish crowd will never desert any of His people. The world may frown on them; their names may be cast out as evil by man: but Jesus never changes, and will one day plead their cause before the whole world.

Fair is the lot that's cast for me ;
I have an Advocate with Thee :
They whom the world caresses most
Have no such privilege to boast.

Poor though I am, despised, forgot ;
Yet God, my God, forgets me not :
And he is safe, and must succeed,
For whom the Lord vouchsafes to plead.

XXXVI.

The Danger of those who Reject the Gospel. Fulness of Christ's Invitations.

ST. MATTHEW XI. 20—30.

20 Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:

21 Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

22 But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.

23 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

24 But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

25 At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.

26 Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.

27 All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.

28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

IN continuing His discourse to the people, after speaking of John the Baptist, our Lord began to upbraid, that is to reprove, rebuke, or denounce heavy judgments on those towns where the people had heard His sermons and seen His miracles but had not repented. Chorazin and Bethsaida were not far from Capernaum, but the precise situation is unknown. Bethsaida literally means a *house of hunting* or *of game*, and it was

probably on the banks of the Sea of Galilee, and supported itself by hunting or fishing. As we have seen before, it was the residence of Philip, Andrew and Peter. Tyre and Sidon were cities of Phœnicia, formerly very opulent, and distinguished for merchandise. They were situated on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, and were on the western part of Judæa, therefore well known to the Jews. Tyre is frequently mentioned in the Old Testament, as being the place whence Solomon brought many of the materials for building the temple. Both these cities were very ancient. Sidon was famous for its great trade and navigation: its inhabitants were the first remarkable merchants in the world, and were much celebrated for their luxury. In the time of our Saviour it was probably a city of much splendour and extensive commerce. It is now called Seide, or Saide, and is far less populous and thriving than in the time of Christ. It was subdued successively by the Babylonians, Egyptians and Romans; the latter of whom deprived it of its freedom. Tyre was about twenty miles south of Sidon: it was built partly on a small island, about seventy paces from the shore, and partly on the main land. It was a city of great size and splendour, extensive commerce, and abounding in luxury and wickedness. It is now the residence of a few fishermen, and contains amidst the ruins of its former magnificence, only a few miserable huts. *Sackcloth* was a coarse cloth like canvas, used for the dress of the poor, and worn also as a sign of mourning, when the Jews also threw ashes on their heads as expressive of grief.

“And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven,” is an expression used to denote great privileges. This city was prosperous, successful in commerce, and signally favoured by its wealth. But most of all, by the presence, the preaching, and the miracles of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here He spent a large portion of His time in the early part of his ministry; and here He performed His chief miracles. But it was possible to hear Christ preach, and see His miracles, and yet to remain unconverted. These declarations of our Lord are peculiarly awful. They teach us that all will be judged according to their spiritual light, and that from those who have enjoyed most religious privileges most will be required; they teach us the exceeding hardness and unbelief of the human heart; also that man is responsible for the state of his own soul. Those who reject the Gospel, and remain impenitent and unbelieving, are not merely objects of pity and compassion, but deeply guilty and blameworthy in God’s sight. God called, but they refused: God spoke to them, but they would not regard. The condemnation of the unbelieving will be strictly just; their blood will be upon their own heads: the Judge of all the earth will do right. Let us think for a moment what dark idolatrous, immoral, profligate places Tyre and Sidon must have been; let us call to mind the unspeakable wickedness of Sodom; let us remember that the cities named by our Lord, Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum were probably no worse than other Jewish towns, and at all events were far better and more moral than Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom; and then let us observe that the

people of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum are to be in the lowest hell, because they heard the Gospel and yet did not repent, because they had great religious advantages and did not use them.

Then let us settle it in our minds that it will never do to be content with merely hearing and liking the Gospel. We must go further than this: we must actually "repent and be converted." (Acts iii. 19.) We must actually lay hold on Christ, and become one with Him. Till then we are in awful danger. It will prove more tolerable to have lived in Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom, than to have heard the Gospel in England and at last died unconverted.

We learn more particularly from the three last verses of this chapter, the breadth and fulness of the invitations of Christ's Gospel. They meet the trembling sinner who asks, "Will Christ reveal His Father's love to such an one as me?" with the most precious encouragement. For eighteen hundred years these verses have been a blessing to the world, and have done good to myriads of souls. Jesus does not address those who feel themselves righteous and worthy, but "all that labour and are heavy laden." All who feel a load on their heart, of which they would fain get free,—a load of sin, or sorrow, anxiety, or remorse; all, whosoever they may be, and whatsoever their past lives,—all such are invited to come to Christ. What a gracious offer Jesus makes! "I will give you rest;" "ye shall find rest to your souls." Unrest is the one great characteristic of the world. Hurry, vexation, failure, disappointment, stare us in the face on every side. But there is rest in Christ,

—rest of conscience and of heart,—rest built on pardon from all sin, and flowing from peace with God. What a simple request Jesus makes to the labouring and heavy laden one: “Come unto Me: take my yoke upon you.” He says nothing of work to be done first; He only asks us to come just as we are, with all our sins, and submit ourselves like little children to His teaching.

Let us mark also what an encouraging account Jesus gives of His service: “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” No doubt there is a cross to be carried, if we follow Christ; trials to be endured, and battles to be fought. But the comforts of the Gospel far outweigh the cross. His commandments are not grievous: “His ways are ways of pleasantness, and all His paths are peace.” (Prov. iii. 17.)

May we never rest satisfied till we know and feel, that we have come to Christ by faith for rest, and do still come to Him for fresh supplies of grace every day. If we have come to Him already let us cleave to Him more closely: if we have never come to Him yet, let us begin to come to day. His word shall never be broken: “Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out.” (John vi. 37.)

Come, ye weary sinners, come,
All who groan beneath your load!
Jesus calls His wand'ers home;
Hasten to your pard'ning God!

Come, ye guilty souls oppressed,
Answer to the Saviour's call:
Come, and I will give you rest;
Come, and I will save you all!

XXXVII

The First Sending Forth of the Apostles. Herod Perplexed by Christ's Works.

ST. LUKE IX. 1—11.

1 Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases.

2 And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick.

3 And he said unto them, Take nothing for *your* journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither money; neither have two coats apiece.

4 And whatsoever house ye enter into, there abide, and thence depart.

5 And whosoever will not receive you, when ye go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet for a testimony against them.

6 And they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel, and healing everywhere.

7 Now Herod the tetrarch heard

of all that was done by him: and he was perplexed, because that it was said of some, that John was risen from the dead;

8 And of some, that Elias had appeared; and of others, that one of the old prophets was risen again.

9 And Herod said, John have I beheaded: but who is this, of whom I hear such things? And he desired to see him.

10 And the Apostles, when they were returned, told him all that they had done. And he took them, and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida.

11 And the people, when they knew it, followed him; and he received them, and spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing.

THESE verses contain our Lord's instructions to His twelve apostles, when He sent them forth the first time to preach the Gospel. He taught them to try their own powers of teaching, and to find out their own weaknesses, while He was yet with them. Thus He was enabled to correct their mistakes, and they were trained for the work they were one day to do, and were not novices when finally left to themselves.

In St. Mark's account we are told that Christ sent forth His apostles "two-and-two." This was in order that they might *support* and *encourage* each other in their work. The wise man had good reason for saying "two are better than one." (Eccles. iv. 9.) Two men together will do more work than two men singly: they will help one another in judgment and in difficulties; they will stir one another up when tempted to idleness, and less often relapse into indolence and indifference; they will comfort one another in times of trial, and be less often cast down. The fact that there is hardly a single case in the Acts where we find Paul or any other apostle working entirely alone, is remarkable. One thing is clear: it is the duty of all workers for Christ to work together, and help one another whenever they can. "As iron sharpeneth iron, so doth the countenance of a man his friend."

Let us notice that one of the principal works for which our Lord sent forth the apostles was *preaching*. The importance of preaching as a means of grace is constantly set forth in the Bible. It is in fact God's chosen instrument for doing good to souls. By it sinners are converted, inquirers led on, and saints built up. A preaching ministry is absolutely essential to the health and prosperity of a visible Church. Would we know whether a minister is a truly apostolical man? If he is, he will give the best of his attention to his sermons; he will labour and pray to make his preaching effective, and will tell his congregation that he looks to preaching for the chief results on souls. Further: it

must not surprise us if we see unconverted men ministers and preachers of the Gospel. Judas Iscariot, the false apostle and traitor, was one of those twelve whom our Lord sent forth to preach and heal the sick; perhaps to show us that we must expect to see the evil mingled with the good in this world. The highest ecclesiastical office and dignity affords no proof that a man has the grace of God.

Our Lord also charges His apostles to study simplicity of habits, and contentment with such things as they have. The leading idea here is a warning to ministers against worldliness and luxurious habits, that they may not destroy by their daily lives the whole work of their lips. The apostles were to beware of appearing changeable, fickle, luxurious, and hard to please. Like men who regard all the world as an inn, and heaven as their home, they were to be content with any lodging and any kind of entertainment.

Our Lord also prepares His disciples to meet with unbelief and impenitence in those to whom they preached. He speaks of those "who will not receive them" as a class which they must expect to see. All ministers of the Gospel, all missionaries, district visitors, and Sunday-school teachers would do well to lay this to heart. Let them not be cast down if their work seems in vain, and their labour without profit. Let them work on patiently, and sow the good seed without fainting. Duties are their's: events are God's.

In the seventh verse we may notice *the power of a bad conscience*. Great and powerful as Herod the Tetrarch

was, the tidings of our Lord's ministry called his sins to remembrance, and disturbed him even in his royal palace. Surrounded as he was by everything which is considered to make life enjoyable, the report of another preacher of righteousness filled him with alarm. The recollection of his own wickedness in killing John the Baptist flashed on his mind. He knew he had done wrong; he felt guilty, self-condemned, and self-dissatisfied: Herod's sin had found him out. The prison and the sword had silenced John the Baptist's tongue, but they could not silence the voice of Herod's inward man. God's truth can neither be silenced, nor bound, nor killed.

Conscience is a most powerful part of our natural constitution. It cannot save our souls, and never leads a man to Christ: it is often blind, and ignorant, and misdirected; yet conscience often raises a mighty testimony against sin in the sinner's heart, and makes him feel that "it is an evil and a bitter thing" to depart from God. Young persons ought especially to remember this, and remembering it, to take heed to their ways. Let them not flatter themselves that all is right when their sins are past and done, and forgotten by the world. Millions will testify at the last day that Herod's experience was their own: conscience called up old sins from their graves, and made them walk up and down in their hearts; in the midst of seeming happiness and prosperity, they were inwardly miserable and distressed. Happy are they who have found the only cure for a bad conscience! Nothing will ever heal it but the blood of Christ.

We learn from the tenth verse the importance to Christians of occasional privacy and retirement. When the apostles returned from their first ministerial work, our Lord "took them and went aside privately into a desert place." This city, "Bethsaida," was not the same as that where Philip, Andrew, and Peter resided, previously mentioned; but was situated on the east bank of the river Jordan, near its entrance into the sea of Galilee. In the neighbourhood are extensive wastes or deserts; and to one of these our Lord retired with His disciples, no doubt to teach and instruct them. This is a lesson which many Christians would do well to remember. Occasional retirement, self-inquiry, meditation, and secret communion with God, are absolutely essential to spiritual health. The man who neglects them is in great danger of a fall. The omission of the practice is the true account of many a backsliding which shocks the Church, and gives occasion to the world to blaspheme.

Let us mark, lastly, our Lord's readiness to receive all who came to Him. When the multitude followed Him even to His retirement, "He received them." Uninvited as this intrusion on His privacy seems to have been, it met with no rebuff from our Lord. His ear was always ready to hear, His hand to work, and His tongue to preach. Let us remember this in all our dealings with Christ about our own souls. We may draw near to Him with boldness, and open our hearts to Him with confidence. We need not fear anything if we commit all to Jesus, the Son of God:

His kindness is unbounded. His own words shall be found abundantly true: "I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls." (Matt. xi. 29.)

So let our lips and lives express
The holy Gospel we profess ;
That men may see our virtues shine,
And own the doctrine is Divine.

Thus shall we best proclaim abroad
The honour of our Saviour, God ;
While the salvation reigns within,
And grace subdues the power of sin.

XXXVIII.

Five Thousand Men Fed with Five Loaves and Two Fishes.

ST. MARK VI. 35—44.

35 And when the day was now far spent, his disciples came unto him, and said, This is a desert place, and now the time is far passed:

36 Send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread: for they have nothing to eat.

37 He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat?

38 He saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? go and see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes.

39 And he commanded them to

make all sit down by companies upon the green grass.

40 And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties.

41 And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided he among them all.

42 And they did all eat, and were filled.

43 And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes.

44 And they that did eat of the loaves were about five thousand men.

OF all our Lord Jesus Christ's miracles none is so frequently described in the Gospels as that we have now read. Each of the four Evangelists was inspired to record it. It is evident that it demands a more than ordinary attention from every reader of God's Word.

We see here a striking instance of our Lord Jesus Christ's Divine power. He feeds an assembly of five thousand men with five loaves and two fishes: He makes a scanty supply of victuals, which was barely

sufficient for the daily wants of Himself and His disciples, satisfy the hunger of a company as large as a Roman legion. There could be no mistake about the reality and greatness of this miracle. It was done publicly, and before many witnesses. The same power which at the beginning made the world out of nothing, caused food to exist which before had not existed. The circumstances of the whole event made deception impossible. Five thousand hungry men would not have agreed that they were "all filled" if they had not received real food. "Twelve baskets full of fragments" would never have been taken up if real material loaves and fishes had not been miraculously multiplied. Nothing, in short, can explain the whole transaction but the finger of God.

In St. John's account of this miracle, Philip is mentioned as saying, "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them." We have no means of knowing what quantity of bread this sum would have procured; but we may remember that the Roman "denarius," or penny, represented a very much larger sum than a penny does among ourselves. The "two hundred pennyworth" would be about equal to six pounds of our money. Bread also was very much cheaper than it is now; so that the quantity Philip mentioned was probably much larger than we suppose. In the same account we read that Andrew mentioned there was a "lad," or little boy, there with five barley loaves and two small fishes; and the fact that this little boy could carry all the supply is a proof how small were the provisions which our Lord miraculously multiplied.

Barley was regarded by the Jews as a coarse food, only fit for horses and asses. The "fishes" were probably small dried fish, such as are not uncommonly used as food now in hot countries, and near the Sea of Galilee would of course be common. The words of Andrew, "What are they among so many?" show how strong was the conviction of our Lord's disciples that they had not sufficient provision to feed the multitude, and then to bring out into clearer light the greatness of the miracle which our Lord wrought. It also helps to prove that this was not a preconcerted and prepared plan arranged by our Lord and His disciples. Even His own immediate followers were taken by surprise.

Jesus commanded that they should all sit down by "companies" upon the green grass, of which St. John tells us "there was much." This arrangement prevented confusion and preserved order. The word translated "company" is only used in this place in the New Testament: it signifies "a company of people reclining at meat." This arrangement made it less easy to practise any imposition or deceit in feeding the multitude. When every man was sitting steadily in his appointed place no one could be passed over in the distribution of food without its being observed.

We have also in this miracle a lesson about the office of ministers. We see the Apostles receiving the bread from our Lord's hands, after He had blessed it, and distributing it to the multitude. It was not their hands that made it increase and multiply, but their Master's: it was His almighty power that provided an

unfailing supply; it was their work to receive humbly and to distribute faithfully. Here is a lively emblem of the work which a true minister of the New Testament is meant to do. He is not a mediator between God and man: he has no power to put away sin or impart grace; his whole business is to receive the bread of life which his Master provides, and to distribute it among the souls among whom he labours. He cannot make men value the bread or receive it; he cannot make it soul-saving or life-giving to any one: for this he is not responsible. We read in St. John's account that Jesus desired His disciples to "gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost." Our Lord's care for little things, and dislike of waste and extravagance, appear strongly in this sentence. It would be well if the principle contained in the words were remembered by Christians. It is of wide application. Time, money, and opportunities of showing kindness and doing good are specially to be remembered in applying this principle.

We learn, lastly, from this miracle, the sufficiency of the Gospel for the wants of all mankind. Weak, feeble, and foolish as it may seem to man, the simple story of the cross is enough for all the children of Adam in every part of the globe. Carried by faithful messengers, it feeds and supplies all ranks and classes. "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but to us who are saved it is the power of God." (1 Cor. i. 18.) Five loaves and two small fishes seemed scanty provision for a hungry crowd; but blessed by Christ, and distributed by His disciples, they were

more than sufficient. We want nothing but the true bread of life, which Christ bestows, distributed faithfully among starving souls. No other teaching can fill hungry consciences and give them peace.

We praise Thee, Lord, for ev'ry good,
For life, and health, and daily food :
Oh, grant us thankful hearts, to take
All that Thou giv'st, for Jesus' sake.

And may our souls be daily fed
With Christ, the true and living bread ;
Till in Thy presence, Lord, we feast
With saints above, in endless rest.

XXXIX.

Christ Walking on the Sea. His Power over the Waters.

ST. MARK VI. 47—56

47 And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land.

48 And he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them.

49 But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out:

50 For they all saw him, and were troubled. And immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.

51 And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered.

52 For they considered not *the* miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened.

53 And when they had passed over, they came into the land of Gennessaret, and drew to the shore.

54 And when they were come out of the ship, straightway they knew him,

55 And ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick, where they heard he was.

56 And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment: and as many as touched him were made whole.

THE effect of the miracle of feeding the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes was so great upon the multitude, that (we learn from John vi. 15) they believed that Jesus was the Messiah whom they expected, and were about to take Him by force and make Him a King; but our Lord "constrained" His disciples to go in a ship before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away: and then "He went up into a mountain apart to pray," as St. Matthew tells us,

and there continued alone until the evening was come. The disciples, in their little ship, or boat, were now about four miles from land, or half way across the Sea of Galilee. The wind had risen, and they were tossed about, and "toiled in rowing;" but Jesus "saw" them, came to them walking on the sea, cheered them with the gracious words, "It is I; be not afraid," and changed the storm into a calm.

There are thoughts of comfort here for all true believers. Wherever they may be, or whatsoever their circumstances, the Lord Jesus sees them. Alone or in company, in sickness or in health, by sea or by land, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, the same eye which saw the disciples tossed on the lake is ever looking at us. We are never beyond the reach of His care. Our way is never hid from Him. He knows the path that we take, and is still able to help: He may not come to our aid at the time we like best, but He will never allow us utterly to fail. He that walked upon the water never changes: He will always come at the right time to uphold His people. Though He tarry, let us wait patiently: Jesus sees us, and will not forsake us.

The old Jewish division of the night was into *three watches*; but the Romans had introduced a fourth. These watches consisted of three hours each. The first commenced at six, and continued until nine; the second from nine to twelve; the third from twelve to three; and the fourth from three to six. The first was called evening; the second, midnight; the third, cock-crowing; the fourth, morning. It is probable that the

term *watch* was given to each of these divisions from the practice of placing sentinels around the camp in time of war, or in cities, to watch or guard the camp or city, and that under the Romans they were relieved four times in the night. It was in the last of these watches, or between three and six in the morning, that Jesus appeared to the disciples; so that He had spent most of the night alone upon the mountain in prayer.

The disciples were "troubled," or afraid, when they saw the form of a man in the dark night amidst the tumultuous billows. They thought it was a spirit or an apparition: it was a common belief among the ancients that the spirits of men after death frequently appeared to the living. Our Lord's tenderness for His disciples' feelings appears beautifully here. No sooner does He see fear than He proceeds to calm it: He assures them that the figure they see walking on the deep is no spirit,—no object of dread; it is their own beloved Master. His voice, well known as it must have been, would of course help to calm their fears; yet even that was not enough until Peter had said (as St. Matthew tells us), "If it be Thou, bid me come to Thee:" and this is an instance of the characteristic ardour and rashness of Peter. He had less *real* faith than he supposed; more ardour than his faith would justify. He was rash, headlong, incautious, really attached to Jesus; but still, easily daunted and prone to fall. He was afraid, therefore, when in danger and sinking, cried again for help. Thus he was suffered to learn his own character and his dependence on

Jesus,—a lesson which all Christians are permitted to learn by dear-bought experience.

We may notice here what power Jesus can bestow on them that believe on Him. We see Simon Peter coming down out of the ship, and walking on the water, like his Lord. What a wonderful proof was this of Christ's Divinity! To walk on the sea Himself was a mighty miracle; but to enable a poor weak disciple to do the same was a mightier miracle still. This shows what great things our Lord can do for those that hear His voice and follow Him. Let us fear nothing if we are in the path of duty. The waters may seem deep; but if Jesus says "Come," we have no cause to be afraid.

Let us also learn from this miracle how merciful our Lord Jesus Christ is to weak believers. We see Him stretching forth His hand immediately to save Peter, as soon as he cried to Him. He does not leave him to reap the fruit of his own unbelief, and to sink in the deep waters; He only seems to consider his trouble, and to think of nothing so much as delivering him from it: the only word He utters is the gentle reproof, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

We should mark here the exceeding "gentleness of Christ." He can bear with much, and forgive much, when He sees true grace in a man's heart. He loved and pitied His people before conversion, and after conversion He loves and pities them still more. He knows their feebleness, and bears long with them. He would have us know that doubting does not prove that a man has no faith, but only that his faith is small; and even

when our faith is small the Lord is ready to help us. "When I said, My foot slippeth; Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up." (Psalm xciv. 18.)

Let us notice, in the concluding verses, what a bright example we have of our duty to one another. We are told that when our Lord came into the land of Genesaret the people "ran through that whole region," and brought to Him in beds "those that were sick."

Let us see here a pattern for ourselves; let us go and do likewise; let us strive to bring all around us who are in need of spiritual medicine to Jesus the Great Physician, that they may be healed. Souls are dying every day,—time is short,—opportunities are rapidly passing away,—the night cometh when no man can work: let us spare no pains in labouring to bring men and women to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, that they may be saved. It is a comfortable thought that "as many as touch Him will be made whole."

Give to the winds thy fears;
 Hope, and be undismayed:
 God hears thy sighs, and counts thy tears;
 God shall lift up thy head.

Through waves, through clouds, and storms,
 He gently clears thy way:
 Wait thou His time, and soon thy night
 Shall end in joyous day.

XL.

The Diseased Cripple at Bethesda Cured.

ST. JOHN V. 1-9.

1 After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

2 Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches.

3 In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.

4 For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.

5 And a certain man was there,

which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.

6 When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?

7 The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.

8 Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.

9 And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.

THE event we are now about to consider commences the second year of our Saviour's public ministry; that is, supposing the feast (which is not named) to be the passover. The going up of Christ to Jerusalem seems to have been on account of the feast. There were two other festivals, the pentecost and the feast of tabernacles, at which the Jews were required to be present, and it might have been one of them. It is of no consequence however which of them is intended. The sheep market was no doubt just outside the sheep-gate. It was not customary to have markets inside cities; and this was near the gate through which the sheep

and oxen were taken into the city for sacrifice. It is mentioned by Nehemiah, ch. iii. I, 32. The gate was doubtless near the temple, and near the present place which is shown as the pool of Bethesda. This name is a Hebrew word meaning "House of Mercy," which was most appropriate, as the pool was celebrated for its healing power: it cured all kinds of disease. This healing power was given to the water by means of an angel's descending into it and troubling or moving the water, after which the first person that stepped in was cured of whatever disease he might have. But only *one* was cured at one time, and these periods were uncertain. Numbers of "impotent" (meaning persons *weak* and *feeble* by long disease) were always on the watch near this pool for the moving of the water, and for their accommodation porches or covered arcades had been erected to protect them from the heat of the sun or in wet weather. The context seems to show that the multitude were assembled at this particular feast in this place, expecting the miracle to be wrought at this special time of the year.

One of the sick persons was suffering with a disease which had afflicted him for thirty-eight years. How long he had been lying at the pool of Bethesda we are not told. His disease was probably paralysis, for he was scarcely able to move. This prevented him from benefiting by the miraculous water, for whenever the pool was troubled, and he feebly attempted to crawl towards it, some stronger person pushed quickly before him, and stepping in first, obtained the cure.

For eight-and-thirty weary summers and winters he

had endured pain and infirmity. He had seen others healed at the waters of Bethesda, and going to their homes rejoicing; but for him there had been no healing. Friendless, helpless, and hopeless, he lay near the wonder-working waters, but derived no benefit from them. Year after year passed away, and left him still uncured. No relief or change for the better seemed likely to come, except from the grave.

Yet although he knew it not, this poor cripple had a friend. One stood by him whose word could work a better cure than that wonderful pool could do; for He could cure both the infirmity of the body and the disease of the soul. Jesus was close to him, yet he was a stranger to Him. He did not know His power and love, he did not know even His name; but Jesus, as in the case of the woman of Samaria (John iv. 7), was the first to speak and begin the conversation.

Unasked, unsolicited, unexpectedly, He mercifully addressed the sick man. No doubt He always begins in man's heart before man begins with Him. He does all things, as a Sovereign, according to His own will; but it is not always that we see Him taking the first step so entirely of Himself as we do here. Christ's inquiry, "Wilt thou be made whole?" was designed to awaken the man's hopes, and to teach him that the only condition of his recovery was his own willingness. It seemed a strange question,—one so strange that the man did not even answer it in a direct way; but at once mentioned the reason for his continuing uncured. It was no fault of his. He did not think it needful to say he was willing. His answer showed plainly that

It was, but he felt that the means was out of his reach. The word rendered "Sir" is the same that is more commonly translated "Lord," and is the same that is rendered "Sir" all through the fourth chapter of this Gospel.

By the words "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk," Jesus not only restored him to health, but gave evidence to those around him that this was a real miracle, and that he was really healed. For nearly forty years this man had been afflicted: he was not even able to walk. But Christ commanded him not only to *walk*, but to take up his *bed* also, and carry that as proof that he was truly made whole. Here, as in other similar cases, it is evident that miraculous healing power went forth with the words of our Lord. When He gives a command, He gives strength to obey it; but it was precisely in the act of obedience that the blessing came. The whole power is Christ's; but He loves to make us exert ourselves, and *show* our faith and obedience.

The man was "immediately" made whole, and walked. Nothing but Divine power could enable one who had been a cripple for so many years to move his limbs and carry a burden all at once. But it was as easy to our Lord to give immediate strength as it was to *create* muscles, nerves, and sinews in the day that Adam was made.

We must remember that the "bed" on which the man lay was nothing more than a light mattress or rug, such as is commonly used in hot countries for sleeping on.

This is just one among many examples of our Lord Jesus Christ's kindness and compassion. He is full of undeserved, unexpected, abounding love towards man. "He delighteth in mercy." (Micah vii. 18.) He is far more ready to save than man is to be saved. No one ever need be afraid of beginning the life of a true Christian, if he feels disposed to begin. Let him not hang back and delay, under the vain idea that Christ is not willing to receive him; let him come boldly, and trust confidently: He that healed the cripple at Bethesda is still the same.

With humble faith on Thee I call,
My Light, my Life, my Lord, my All!
I wait the moving of the pool;
I wait the word that speaks me whole.

Speak, gracious Lord! my sickness cure,
Make my infected nature pure;
Peace, righteousness, and joy impart,
And give Thyself unto my heart.

1, E

Wednesday. (Second Part.)
The Majesty of Christ.

16 V. 10—18.

10	no more, lest a worse thing come
11	unto thee.
12	15 The man departed, and told
13	the Jews that it was Jesus, which
14	had made him whole.
15	16 And therefore did the Jews
16	persecute Jesus, and sought to slay
17	him, because he had done these
18	things on the sabbath day.
19	17 But Jesus answered them,
20	My Father worketh hitherto, and
21	I work.
22	18 Therefore the Jews sought
23	the more to kill him, because he not
24	only had broken the sabbath, but
25	said also that God was his Father,
26	making himself equal with God.

...ative of the cripple, whom our
...esda, we find that it was on the
...acle was wrought. As the healed
...e city, the passers by reproved
...bed on the Sabbath. The carry-
...e reproved in Jer. xvii. 21; and
...nders interpreted this as forbidding
...e very lightest weight, although it
...ordinary labour. The bed in this
...e than a thick rug, easily rolled up
...e man answered rightly that He who

had miraculously cured him had a right to his obedience. No other person had done so much for him, and no other person could therefore have an equal right to direct him. If Christ has saved us, He has also bought us with His blood, and has a right to our implicit or unquestioning obedience. (1 Cor. vi. 20.) We are His, and must regard ourselves as being at His disposal. His word is our law, and this extends even to our thoughts. (2 Cor. x. 5.)

We might expect the Jews to be astonished to hear of this man's restoration to health, and to think more of that than of so trifling a matter as his carrying his bed; but they were such formalists that they cared more about what they fancied to be a violation of the law than about the wonderful miracle which had just been wrought. They desired to find out who had commanded this man to carry his bed, probably supposing that it must be Jesus, and rejoicing in the thought of bringing a charge against Him. But the man could not inform them, for Jesus had not told him His name, and had quietly withdrawn on account of the crowd of people.

It appears as if the healed man afterwards went to the temple to express his thankfulness, by joining in the sacred services. There Christ met him, and he learned that his benefactor was Jesus, and also a lesson in the solemn words our Lord addressed to him: "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." Every sickness and sorrow is the voice of God speaking to us.

Each has its peculiar message. Happy are they who have an eye to see God's hand, and an ear to hear His

voice, in all ~~that~~ happens to them. Nothing in this world happens by chance.

And as it is with sickness, so it is with recovery: renewed health should send us back to our post in the world with a deeper hatred of sin, a more thorough watchfulness over our own ways, and a more constant purpose of mind to live to God. Far too often the excitement and novelty of returning health tempt us to forget the vows and intentions of the sick room. There are spiritual dangers attending a recovery! Well would it be for us all after illness to grave these words on our hearts, "Let me sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto me."

The healed man eagerly made known the name of his Almighty Friend. There is no proof that he did this with any evil design. Born a Jew and taught to reverence his rulers and elders, he naturally wished to give them the information they desired, and had no reason to suppose that they would injure his Benefactor. This awakened the persecuting spirit of the pharisaic Jews: they objected to the miracle because it had been done on the Sabbath; their enmity was so furious that they sought to kill the merciful Jesus, who however was not afraid of them but boldly went among them, and clearly and strikingly showed His Divine authority over the Sabbath. Our Lord's reply to the Jews is very remarkable: "My Father," he says, "worketh hitherto, and I also work." It is as though He said,— "Though my Father rested on the seventh day from His work of creation, He has never rested for a moment from His providential government of the world, and

from His merciful work of supplying the daily wants of all His creatures : were He to rest from such work the whole frame of nature would stand still. And I also work works of mercy on the Sabbath day : I do not break the fourth commandment when I heal the sick any more than my Father breaks it when He causes the sun to rise and the grass to grow on the Sabbath."

We must distinctly understand that neither here nor elsewhere does the Lord Jesus overthrow the obligation of the fourth commandment. Neither is there a word to justify the vague assertions of some modern teachers, that "Christians ought not to keep a Sabbath," and that it is "a Jewish institution which has passed away." Our Lord places the claims of the Sabbath on the right foundation. He clears the day of rest from the false and superstitious teaching of the Jews about the right way of observing it. He shows us clearly that works of necessity and works of mercy are no breach of the fourth commandment.

We learn also from these verses the dignity and greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Jews sought the more to kill Him because He said "that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God." They had now *two* pretences for seeking His life ; not only the violation of the Sabbath, but making Himself equal with God, which they considered blasphemy. We cannot, in these limits, enter into our Lord's reply on this special occasion ; but let us think whether it is possible to make too much of Christ in our religion. If we ever have thought so, let us cast aside the thought for ever. Both in His own nature as God,

and in His office as commissioned Mediator, He is worthy of all honour. He that is one with the Father, the Giver of life, the King of kings, the coming Judge, can never be too much exalted. "He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father that sent Him."

If we desire salvation let us lean our whole weight on this mighty Saviour. So leaning, we never need be afraid. Christ is the Rock of Ages, and he that builds on Him shall never be confounded; neither in sickness, nor in death, nor in the judgment day. The hand that was nailed to the cross is almighty: the Saviour of sinners is "mighty to save." (Isai. lxiii. 1.)

Great God, this sacred day of Thine
Demands the soul's collected powers;
May we employ in work divine
These solemn, consecrated hours.
Oh, may our souls, adoring, own
The grace that calls us to Thy throne.

Thy Spirit's powerful aid impart;
Oh, may Thy Word, with life divine,
Engage the ear and warm the heart.
Then shall the day indeed be Thine:
Then shall our souls, adoring, own
The grace that calls us to Thy throne.

Parable of the Wheat and Tares.

ST. MATTHEW XIII. 36—43.

36 Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.

37 He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;

38 The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one;

39 The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

40 As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.

41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;

42 And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

43 Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

THIS parable was spoken by our Lord to the people by the seaside, immediately after that of the sower which we considered in a former reading, as well as others, as we are told in the thirty-fourth verse of this chapter: "All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables." Having finished His discourse He sent them away, and retired to His house at Capernaum, where we may conclude He was dwelling for a time with His disciples. When they were once more quietly gathered together, the disciples asked our Lord to give them a fuller explanation of this parable, which is one of peculiar importance to us in the present day.

The meaning of this parable is plain. The field represents the *world* in which the Gospel is preached; the *good seed*, the truths preached by Christ and His Apostles. By *tares* is probably meant a degenerate kind of wheat, or the darnel grass growing in Palestine: in its growth and form it has a strong resemblance to genuine wheat, but it either produces no grain, or that of a very inferior and hurtful kind: it was extremely difficult to separate it from the genuine wheat on account of its similarity while growing. Thus it aptly represents hypocrites in the Church strongly resembling Christians in outward appearances; it is often impossible to distinguish them, nor can they be separated until it is done by the great Searcher of hearts at the day of judgment. Thus they must remain together until the end, when they shall be separated,—the righteous saved, and the wicked lost. The one shall shine clear as the sun; the other be cast into a furnace of fire: a most expressive image of suffering. We have no idea of more acute pain than to be thrown into the fire, and our bodies being made capable of bearing the burning heat; then to live on suffering in this manner for ever and ever. It is not certain that our Saviour meant to teach here that hell is made up of *material* fire; but it is certain that He meant to teach that this idea would fitly represent those sufferings: neither would the Redeemer deceive or use words to torment and tantalize us. He would not talk of hell-fire which had no existence; nor would the God of truth hold out frightful images merely to terrify mankind. If *He* has spoken of hell, then there *is* a hell; if *He*

meant to say that the wicked *shall* suffer, then they *will* suffer. We learn, therefore, from this parable, that good and evil will always be found together in the professing Church until the end of the world.

The visible Church is set before us as a mixed body. It is a vast "field," in which "wheat and tares" grow side by side. We must expect to find believers and unbelievers, converted and unconverted, the "children of the kingdom and the children of the wicked one," all mingled together in every congregation of baptized people.

The purest preaching of the Gospel will not prevent this. In every age of the Church the same state of things has existed. It was the experience of the early Fathers; it was the experience of the Reformers; it is the experience of the best ministers at the present hour. There has never been a visible Church or a religious assembly of which the members have been all "wheat." The devil, that great énémy of souls, has always taken care to sow "tares."

Are we inclined to look for the conversion of the world by the labours of ministers and missionaries? We shall never see all the inhabitants of earth the "wheat" of God in the present order of things. The tares and wheat will "grow together till the harvest." Are we ever tried by the scoffing argument of the infidel, that Christianity cannot be a true religion, because there are so many false Christians? Let us call to mind this parable, and remain unmoved. Let us tell the infidel that the state of things he scoffs at does not surprise us at all. Our Master prepared us

for it eighteen hundred years ago. He foresaw and foretold that His Church would be a field, containing not only "wheat," but "tares."

Are we ever tempted to leave one Protestant Church for another, because we see many of its members unconverted? Let us remember this parable, and take heed what we do. We shall never find a perfect Church. Go where we will, and worship where we may, we shall always find "tares."

We learn, further, that there is to be a day of separation between the godly and the ungodly members of the visible Church at the end of the world. The present mixed state of things is not to be for ever. The wheat and the tares are to be divided at last. The Lord Jesus shall "send forth His angels" in the day of His second advent, and gather all professing Christians into two great companies. Those mighty reapers shall make no mistake: they shall discern with unerring judgment between the righteous and the wicked, and place every one in his own lot. The saints and faithful servants of Christ shall receive glory, honour, and eternal life. The worldly, the ungodly, the careless, and the unconverted shall be "cast into a furnace of fire."

Let the ungodly man tremble when he reads this parable; let him know that he is sowing misery for himself, if he goes on still in his neglect of God; let him reflect that his end will be to be gathered among the "bundles of tares" and be burned.

Let the believer in Christ take comfort when he reads this parable. Let him see that there is happiness

and safety for him in the great and dreadful day of the Lord. The voice of the archangel and the trump of God will proclaim no terror for him. They will summon him to join what he has long desired to see,—a perfect Church and a perfect communion of saints. How beautiful will the whole body of believers appear when finally separated from the wicked! The righteous are little known in the present day. The world sees no beauty in them, even as it saw none in their Master; but the righteous shall one day “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.” (Col. iii. 4.)

Ye who in His courts are found,
List'ning to the joyful sound,
Lost and helpless as ye are,
Sons of sorrow, sin, and care,
Glorify the King of kings,—
Take the peace the Gospel brings.

Turn to Christ your longing eyes,
View His bloody sacrifice;
See in Him your sins forgiven,—
Pardon, holiness, and heaven:
Glorify the King of kings,—
Take the peace the Gospel brings.

XLIII.

Christ's Treatment in His own Country. The Danger of Unbelief.

ST. MATTHEW XIII. 51—58.

51 Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord.

52 Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe *which is* instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man *that is* an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure *things* new and old.

53 And it came to pass, *that* when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence.

54 And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said,

Whence hath this *man* this wisdom, and *these* mighty works?

55 Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?

56 And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this *man* all these things?

57 And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house.

58 And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

AFTER explaining to His disciples the parable of the wheat and the tares, as commented on in our last reading, our Lord continued to instruct them by three other parables,—those of the treasure hid in a field, the pearl of great price, and the net cast into the sea, which we have not time or space to dwell upon. In the verses just read, we ought to notice the *striking question* with which our Lord winds up the seven wonderful parables of this chapter. He said, “Have ye understood all these things?”

Personal application has been called the “soul” of preaching. A sermon without application is like a

letter posted without a direction. It may be well written, rightly dated, and duly signed; but it is useless, because it never reaches its destination. Our Lord's inquiry is an admirable example of real heart-searching application: "Have ye understood?" The mere form of hearing a sermon can profit no man, unless he comprehends what it means: he might just as well attend a Roman Catholic service in Latin. His intellect must be set in motion and his heart impressed; ideas must be received into his mind: he must carry off the seed of new thoughts. Without this he hears in vain. Let us watch our souls in this matter; let us take with us to church not only our bodies, but our minds, our reason, our hearts, and our consciences. Intellect no doubt is not everything in religion; but it does not therefore follow that it is nothing at all. The heart is unquestionably the main point: but the Holy Ghost generally reaches the heart through the mind.

The disciples answered our Lord's question by saying that they had understood the truth, and He then proceeds to tell them it should not be unemployed: they should bring it forth in due time, like a householder bringing forth out of his treasury, or place of deposit, what had been laid up there, as it was needed. The truths, new or old, which every properly instructed preacher has gained, should be brought forth in due season to benefit others. Human learning *alone* is indeed of no value to a minister; but all learning that will enable him better to understand the Bible, and to communicate its truths, *is* valuable, and should if

possible he gained. A minister should be like the father of a family, distributing to the Church as it needs, and out of his treasures bringing forth truth to confirm the feeble, enlighten the ignorant, and guide those in danger of straying away.

We must notice also in these verses the strange treatment which our Lord received in His own country, meaning Nazareth, where He had been brought up. His teaching in their synagogue was no doubt the same as it always was: "Never man spake like this Man." But it had no effect on the people of Nazareth. They were "astonished;" but their hearts were unmoved. They said, "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary?" They despised Him because they were so familiar with Him. "They were offended in Him." And they drew from our Lord the solemn remark, "A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house."

There is nothing in all this that need surprise us. The same thing is going on around us every day in our own land. The Holy Scriptures, the preaching of the Gospel, the public ordinances of religion, the abundant means of grace that England enjoys, are continually undervalued by English people. They are so accustomed to them that they do not know their privileges. It is an awful truth that in religion more than in anything else familiarity breeds contempt. Men forget that truth is truth, however old and hackneyed it may sound, and despise it because it is old. Alas, by so doing they provoke God to take it away!

Do we ever fancy that if we had only seen and heard

Jesus Christ, we should have been His faithful disciples? Do we think that if we had only lived near Him, and been eye-witnesses of His ways, we should not have been undecided, wavering, and half-hearted about religion? If we do, let us think so no longer. Let us observe the people of Nazareth, and learn wisdom.

The people of Nazareth said of Jesus, "Is not this the carpenter's son?" In St. Mark's account (vi. 3), the expression is still stronger: "Is not this the *carpenter*, the son of Mary?" This is perhaps a decisive proof that our Lord had worked at the business until He was thirty years of age. Our Saviour therefore spent the greater part of His life in honest, useful industry. He thus set an example that life is not wasted in such employments: they are appointed as the lot of man; and if connected with a life of religion, will meet with the approval of God. It was moreover the custom of the Jews to train all their children, even those of wealth and learning, to some *trade* or manual occupation. Thus St. Paul was a tentmaker. (Acts xviii. 3.)

We must also notice in these verses the ruinous nature of unbelief. The chapter ends with the fearful words, "He did not many works there because of their unbelief."

We see here the secret of the everlasting ruin of multitudes of souls: they perish for ever because they *will not believe*. There is nothing beside in earth or heaven that prevents their salvation: their sins, however many, might all be forgiven. The Father's love

is ready to receive them ; the blood of Christ is ready to cleanse them ; the power of the Spirit is ready to renew them. But a great barrier interposes : they will not believe. "Ye will not come unto Me," says Jesus, "that ye might have life." (John v. 40.)

Let us watch our own hearts carefully in the matter of unbelief. The heart, and not the head, is the seat of its mysterious power. It is neither the want of evidence nor the difficulties of Christian doctrine that make men unbelievers. It is the want of will to believe. Let us go on watching our hearts even after we have believed. The root of unbelief is never entirely destroyed. No prayer is so important as that of the disciples, "Lord, increase our faith."

Author of faith, to Thee I cry,—
To Thee, who would'st not have me die,
But know the truth and live ;
Open mine eyes to see Thy face,
Work in my heart Thy saving grace,
And life eternal give.

Be it according to Thy Word !
Now let me find my pard'ning, Lord ;
Let what I ask be given ;
The bar of unbelief remove,
Open the door of faith and love,
And take me into heaven !

XLIV.

The Daughter of the Canaanitish Woman Healed.

ST. MATTHEW XV. 21—28.

21 Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, *thou* son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

23 But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost

sheep of the house of Israel.

25 Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast *it* to dogs.

27 And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table.

28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

OUR Lord returned to Capernaum after the treatment he experienced at Nazareth, and there preached against the traditions of the elders, as related in the first part of this chapter. The scribes and Pharisees were so offended at this doctrine that Jesus probably left the city in consequence of the excitement produced; but before leaving he instructed His disciples in regard to the spirituality of true religion. (Matt. xv. 1, 20.) The Saviour did not enter the territories of Tyre and Sidon: He only went to their borders. The distressed mother "came out of the same coasts," showing that Jesus was not within them. It would not have been in accordance with Christ's great work to go into the country of the Gentiles: His mission was "to His own." (John i. 11.)

But the light which shone around Him reached even into Gentile lands, and a heathen woman comes to Jesus. Our Lord confined His ministry to the Jews, because if He had preached to the Gentiles or heathen nations, it would have been an excuse for the Jews not believing. Their bigotry would have taken alarm. We may remember how they avoided their own publicans, and shrank from intercourse with the mixed race of Samaria. If, then, Jesus had proclaimed His Gospel to the Gentiles, the prejudices of the narrow-minded Jews would have been so much offended that Christ would not have been allowed to exercise His ministry. Even the more enlightened Apostles, when the time came to show that Christ has one fold for all, hesitated to admit Gentiles, as we see in the case of Cornelius. (Acts x. 34.)

We may notice from these verses that true faith may sometimes be found where it might have been least expected. A Canaanitish woman cries to our Lord for help on behalf of her daughter: "Have mercy on me," she says, "O Lord, Thou Son of David." Such a prayer would have showed great faith, had she lived in Bethany or Jerusalem; but when we find that she came from the "coasts of Tyre and Sidon," such a prayer may well fill us with surprise. It ought to teach us that it is grace, not place, which makes people believers. We may live in a prophet's family, like Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, and yet continue impenitent, unbelieving, and fond of the world; we may dwell in the midst of superstition and dark idolatry, like the little maid in Naaman's house, and yet be

faithful witnesses for God and His Christ. Let us not despair of any one's soul, merely because his lot is cast in an unfavourable position. It is possible to dwell in the coasts of Tyre and Sidon and yet sit down in the kingdom of God.

We see also that affliction sometimes proves a blessing to a person's soul.

The Canaanitish mother no doubt had been sorely tried. She had seen her darling child vexed with a devil, and been unable to relieve her; but yet that trouble brought her to Christ, and taught her to pray. Without it she might have lived and died in careless ignorance, and never seen Jesus at all. Surely it was good for her that she was afflicted. (Psalm cxix. 71.)

Let us mark this well. There is nothing which shows our ignorance so much as our impatience under trouble. We forget that every cross is a message from God, and intended to do us good in the end. Trials are intended to make us think, to wean us from the world, to send us to the Bible, to drive us to our knees. Health is a good thing; but sickness is far better, if it leads us to God: prosperity is a great mercy; but adversity is a greater one, if it brings us to Christ. Anything is better than living in carelessness and dying in sin. Better a thousand times be afflicted, like the Canaanitish mother, and like her, flee to Christ than live at ease, like the rich "fool," and die at last without Christ and without hope. (Luke xii. 20.)

We see also that Christ's people are often less gracious and compassionate than Christ Himself. This woman found small favour with our Lord's disciples. They

might have regarded her as unworthy of their Master's help ; at any rate they said, "Send her away." There is only too much of this spirit among many who profess and call themselves believers : they are apt to discourage inquirers after Christ, instead of helping them forward. Let us beware of giving way to this spirit ; let us seek to have more of the mind that was in Christ. Like Him, let us be gentle, kind, and encouraging in all our treatment of those who are seeking to be saved ; let us assure them that there is far more in that gracious Master than there is in the best of His servants. Peter and James and John may say to the afflicted soul, "Send her away ;" but such a word never came from the lips of Christ. He may sometimes keep us long waiting, as He did this woman ; but He will never send us empty away.

We see, further, what encouragement there is to persevere in prayer, both for ourselves and others.

The prayer of this afflicted mother at first seemed entirely unnoticed. Jesus "answered her not a word ;" yet she prayed on. The saying which by and by fell from our Lord's lips sounded discouraging : "I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Yet she prayed on : "Lord, help me." The second saying of our Lord was even less encouraging than the first : "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs." Yet "hope deferred" did not "make her heart sick." (Prov. xiii. 12.) Even then she was not silenced : she finds a plea for some "crumbs" of mercy to be granted to her ; and her importunity obtained at length a gracious reward : "O woman,

great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

Let us remember this history when *we pray for ourselves*. We are sometimes tempted to think that we get no good by our prayers, and may as well give them up altogether. Let us resist the temptation: it comes from the devil. Let us believe, and pray on. For strength to do our duty, for grace to bear our trials, for comfort in every trouble, let us "continue in prayer." Let us be sure no time is so well spent as on our knees. Jesus hears us, and in His own good time will give an answer.

Let us remember this history when *we intercede for others*. Have we children, relations, and friends about whose conversion and salvation we are anxious? Let us follow the example of this Canaanitish woman, and lay the state of their souls before Christ; let us never rest till we have an answer. We may have to wait many a long year; we may seem to pray in vain, and intercede without profit; but let us never give up while life lasts. Let us believe that Jesus is not changed, and that He who heard the Canaanitish mother, and granted her request, will also hear us, and one day give us an answer of peace.

Oh, King of Salem, Prince of Peace,
Bid strife among Thy subjects cease!
One is our faith, and one our Lord:
One body, spirit, hope, reward;
One God and Father of us all,
On whom Thy Church and people call:
Oh, may we one communion be,—
One with each other, one in Thee!

XLV.

The Deaf made to Hear, and the Dumb to Speak.

ST. MARK VII. 31—37.

31 And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis.

32 And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him.

33 And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue;

34 And looking up to heaven,

he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened.

35 And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.

36 And he charged them that they should tell no man: but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it;

37 And were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.

AFTER the miracle recorded in our last "reading," viz., curing the daughter of the Canaanitish woman, our Lord did not remain long in the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon. He kept at the northern part of Galilee, still away from Capernaum, where so much excitement had arisen on account of His last preaching against the Jewish traditions. He came near to the Sea of Galilee by journeying towards the north-east, till He arrived at the other side of that sea, at the part called Decapolis, near the spot where He had fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes; but though in retired places, He was sufficiently known by the people, for they soon brought Him a man who

needed His help. This man could not speak plainly, and he could not hear. His friends besought the Saviour to put His hand upon him: the imposition of hands was a customary mode of imparting a blessing. For the first time Jesus performed a miracle privately. We are not told the reason of this; but we may learn from it that our Lord has many ways of performing gracious works, and that we must not expect spiritual blessings to be given always in the same mode. For instance, one person may be converted to God in the midst of the congregation, another in the solitude of his own room; with another, in illness the Lord may speak to his soul. The attendant circumstances may be varied in each individual. The Saviour's word would have been sufficient; but He used means, probably to awaken the man's attention, and to put honour on the use of means. He could not hear Jesus speak, but the touching his ears and tongue would signify the merciful design which was now to be carried out. Looking up to heaven the Saviour sighed,—for He was full of pity, and always touched with the feelings of our infirmities; then came the words of commanding power: "Ephphatha, that is, Be opened." There is undoubtedly much that is mysterious in these actions. We know not why they were used. It would have been as easy to our Lord to speak the word, and command health to return at once, as to do what He here did. His reasons for the course He adopted are not recorded. We only know that the result was the same as on other occasions: the man was cured.

We see but half the instruction of this passage if we only regard it as an example of our Lord's Divine power. It is such an example, beyond doubt; but it is something more than that. We must look further, deeper, and lower than the surface, and we shall find in the passage precious spiritual truths.

We may see here our Lord's power to heal the spiritually deaf. He can give the chief of sinners a hearing ear: He can make him delight in listening to the very Gospel which he once ridiculed and despised. We may also see here our Lord's power to heal the spiritually dumb. He can teach the hardest of transgressors to call upon God: He can put a new song in the mouth of him whose talk was once only of this world: He can make the vilest of men speak of spiritual things, and testify the Gospel of the grace of God.

When Jesus pours forth His Spirit nothing is impossible. We must never despair of others: we must never regard our own hearts as too bad to be changed. He that healed the deaf and dumb still lives. The cases which moral philosophy pronounces hopeless are not incurable if they are brought to Christ.

The last thing which demands our notice in these verses is the remarkable testimony which was borne by those who saw the miracle here recorded. They said of our Lord, "He hath done all things well."

Probably those who said these words were little sensible of their full meaning when applied to Christ; but the truth to which they gave utterance is full of deep and unspeakable comfort, and ought to be daily

remembered by all true Christians. Let us remember it as we look back over the days past of our lives: from the hour of our conversion, "Our Lord hath done all things well." In first bringing us out of darkness into marvellous light,—in humbling us and teaching us our weakness, guilt, and folly,—in stripping us of our idols, and choosing all our portions,—in placing us where we are, and giving us what we have,—how well everything has been done! How great the mercy that we have not had our own way!

Let us remember it as we look forward to the days yet to come. We know not what they may be,—bright or dark, many or few; but we know that we are in the hands of Him who "doeth all things well." He will not err in any of His dealings with us; He will give and take away; He will afflict and bereave; He will move and He will settle, with perfect wisdom, at the right time, in the right way. The Great Shepherd of the sheep makes no mistakes. He leads every lamb of His flock by the right way to the city of habitation.

We shall never see the full beauty of these words till the resurrection morning. We shall then look back over our lives, and know the meaning of everything that happened from first to last. We shall remember all the way by which we walked, and confess that all was "well done." The why and the wherefore, the causes and the reasons, of everything which now perplexes, will be clear and plain as the sun at noonday. We shall wonder at our own past blindness, and marvel that we could ever have doubted our Lord's love.

“Now we see through a glass, darkly ; but then face to face : now we know in part ; but then shall we know even as we are known.” (1 Cor. xiii. 12.)

We cannot always trace the way
Where Thou, our gracious Lord, dost move ;
But we can always surely say
That Thou art Love.

When myst'ry shrouds our darkened path,
We'll check our fears,—our doubts reprove ;
In this our soul sweet comfort hath
That Thou art Love.

Yes : Thou art Love. A truth like this
Can ev'ry gloomy thought remove,
And turn all tears or woes to bliss :
Our God is Love.

XLVI.

*Four Thousand Fed with Seven Loaves and a few
Small Fishes.*

ST. MARK VIII. 1—10.

1 In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples *unto him*, and saith unto them,

2 I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat :

3 And if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way : for divers of them came from far.

4 And his disciples answered him, From whence can a man satisfy these *men* with bread here in the wilderness ?

5 And he asked them, How many loaves have ye ? And they said, Seven.

6 And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground : and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before *them* ; and they did set *them* before the people.

7 And they had a few small fishes : and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before *them*.

8 So they did eat, and were filled : and they took up of the broken *meat* that was left seven baskets.

9 And they that had eaten were about four thousand : and he sent them away.

10 And straightway he entered into a ship with his disciples, and came into the parts of Dalmanutha.

THE miracle recorded here—the feeding of the four thousand—took place on a mountain near the Sea of Galilee, where the multitude were gathered together after the Lord's healing of the deaf and dumb man, and many other cures which He performed, as narrated in St. Matthew xv. 30—32.

The interest excited by Christ's miraculous cures was so great that the people remained in the same locality for three days, quite regardless of the want of food. Anxiety to be near Jesus, to see His wonderful actions, and to hear His wonderful words, overcame

every lesser care. Alas, it is not so in our day! It is indeed just the contrary: anxiety about earthly things keeps many people from coming to Christ, and from caring for heavenly blessings. This anxiety is often brought even into the house of God.

Once more, then, we see our Lord feeding a great multitude with a few loaves and fishes. He knew the heart of man: He foresaw the rise of cavillers and sceptics, who would question the reality of the wonderful works He performed. By repeating the mighty miracle here recorded, He stops the mouth of all who are not wilfully blind to evidence. Publicly, and before four thousand witnesses, He shows His Almighty power a second time.

Let us observe here the *kindness* and *compassion* of our Lord Jesus Christ. He saw around Him a "very great multitude," who had nothing to eat: He knew that the great majority were following Him from no other motive than idle curiosity, and had no claim whatever to be regarded as His disciples; yet when He saw them hungry and destitute He pitied them. He has compassion even on those who are not His people: the faithless, the graceless, the followers of this world. He feels tenderly for them, though they know it not; He died for them, though they care little for what He did on the cross; He would receive them graciously, and pardon them freely, if they would only repent and believe on Him. It is a curious and striking fact that of all the feelings experienced by our Lord when on earth, there is none so often mentioned as *compassion*. His joy, His sorrow, His thankfulness, His anger, His

wonder, His zeal,—all are occasionally recorded ; but none of these feelings are so frequently mentioned as “compassion.” The Holy Spirit seems to point out to us that this was the distinguishing feature of His character, and the predominant feeling of His mind when He was among men. Nine times over,—to say nothing of expressions in parables,—nine times over the Spirit has caused that word “compassion” to be written in the Gospels. Nothing is written by chance in the Word of God. There is a special reason for the selection of every single expression. That word “compassion” no doubt was specially chosen for our profit. It ought to encourage all who are hesitating about beginning to walk in God’s ways. Let them remember that their Saviour is full of compassion. He will receive them graciously ; He will forgive them freely ; He will remember their former iniquities no more ; He will supply all their need abundantly. Let them not be afraid. Christ’s mercy is a deep well, of which no one ever found the bottom.

It ought to comfort the saints and servants of the Lord when they feel weary. Let them call to mind that Jesus is full of “compassion.” He knows what a world it is in which they live ; He knows the body of a man and all its frailties ; He knows the devices of their enemy, the devil. And the Lord pities His people. Let them not be cast down. They may feel that weakness, failure, and imperfection are stamped on all they do ; but let them not forget that word which says “His compassions fail not.” (Lam. iii. 22.)

Let us strive to make Jesus our pattern in this, as

well as in everything else; let us be kind, and compassionate, and pitiful, and courteous to all men; let us be ready to do good to all, and not only to friends and the household of faith; let us carry into practice our Lord's injunction,—“Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you.” (Matt. v. 44.) This is to show the mind of Christ; this is the right way to heap coals of fire on an enemy's head, and to melt foes into friends.

Let us observe also from this passage that with Christ *nothing* is *impossible*.

The disciples said, “Whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?” They might well say so. Without the hand of Him who first made the world out of nothing, the thing could not be; but in the Almighty hands of Jesus seven loaves and a few fishes were made sufficient to satisfy four thousand men. Nothing is too hard for the Lord.

It is worthy of notice that in this *second* miracle of feeding the multitude, where *seven baskets* of fragments were taken up, the word translated *basket* is quite different from that used in the narrative of the feeding of the five thousand, where *twelve* baskets full were taken up. These were wicker baskets, such as the Jews were remarkable for carrying with them; while the *seven* baskets mentioned in the second miracle must have been very large, for it is the same word used when it is said that St. Paul was “let down in a *basket* from the wall.” (Acts ix. 25.)

We must never allow ourselves to doubt Christ's power to supply the spiritual wants of His people. He

has "bread enough and to spare" for every soul that trusts in Him: He has a boundless store of mercy and grace laid up for the use of all His believing members, and ready to be bestowed on all who ask in prayer. Let us never doubt Christ's providential care for the temporal wants of all His people. He still lives who had compassion on the hungry crowd in the wilderness, and supplied their need. How much more will He supply the need of those who trust Him? Their faith will be tried. They may sometimes be kept waiting, and brought very low; but the believer shall never be left entirely destitute.

Great God, the treasures of Thy love
Are everlasting mines;
Deep as our helpless miseries are,
And boundless as our sins.

The happy gates of Gospel grace
Stand open night and day:
Lord, we are come to seek supplies,
And drive our wants away.

XLVII.

Enmity of the Scribes and Pharisees. Christ's Warning against Them.

ST. MATTHEW XVI. 1—12.

1 The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven.

2 He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, *It will be fair weather*: for the sky is red.

3 And in the morning, *It will be foul weather to day*: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?

4 A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed.

5 And when his disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread.

6 Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

7 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, *It is because we have taken no bread.*

8 Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread?

9 Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?

10 Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?

11 How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees?

12 Then understood they how that he bade *them* not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

IN these verses we find our Lord assailed by the untiring enmity of the Pharisees and Sadducees. As a general rule these two sects were at enmity between themselves. In persecuting Christ, however, they made common cause. Truly it was an unholy alliance: yet how often we see the same thing in the present day! Men of the most opposite opinions and habits will

agree in disliking the Gospel, and will work together to oppose its progress. "There is no new thing under the sun." (Eccles. i. 9.) The Pharisees came *tempting*, that is, *trying* our Lord; feigning a desire to see evidence that He was the Messiah, but really wishing to see Him work a miracle and fail, that they might betray and ruin Him. They demanded a "sign from heaven;" that is, some miraculous appearance in the sky. Such had been given by the Prophets in the Old Testament. Samuel had caused it to thunder (1 Sam. xii. 16—18); Isaiah had caused the shadow to go back ten degrees on the dial of Ahaz (Isa. xxxviii. 8); Moses had sent them manna from heaven (Exod. xvi. 4.) These Pharisees and Sadducees supposed, if He was the Messiah, that His miracles would not all be confined *to the earth*; but that He was able to give some signal miracle from heaven. This was the second time they had thus tempted Jesus, and also the second time He had answered them in the same words. (See Matt. xii. 39.) This repetition shows that our Lord was in the habit of *saying the same things over again*. It is evident it was His custom to bring forward certain truths again and again, and thus to impress them more deeply on the minds of His disciples. He knew the weakness of our memories in spiritual things; He knew that what we hear twice we remember better than what we hear once; He therefore brought out of His treasury old things as well as new.

"The sign of the Prophet Jonas" means the *sign or evidence* which was given to the people of Nineveh

that he was from God; that as Jonah had been preserved three days by a miracle, and then restored *alive*, so Jesus would be raised from the dead after three days: and this should be a satisfactory evidence to them that He was from God, as the miraculous preservation of Jonah had been to the Ninevites that he was Divinely commissioned. The word *Jonas* is the Greek way of writing the Hebrew word *Jonah*, as *Elias* is for *Elijah*. For the account of Jonah's preservation we must look to Jonah i. 17. This event took place in the Mediterranean Sea, somewhere between Joppa and Tarshish, when he was fleeing *from* Nineveh. It has been objected that the *whale* seldom passes into that sea, and that its throat is too small to admit a man; it is probable, therefore, that a fish of the shark kind is intended, which has been often known to swallow a man entire. The fish in the book of Jonah is described merely as a *great fish*, without specifying its kind: the Greek word translated *whale* in the New Testament may denote a large fish of any kind. Jonah was a type of Christ in three ways: he was sent in mercy to Nineveh; he was buried in a sepulchre wherein no man had before lain; and on the third day he was raised again.

"He left them and departed." Here is a text for a sermon to the conscience. What an awful text! The day of grace will end; and when Jesus leaves the sinner, and departs from those by whom He has been despised and rejected, He will only return as the Judge to call them to strict account.

Our Lord's conversation with the Pharisees and Sad-

ducees had taken place on the east of the Sea of Galilee; as St. Mark says, they "came into the parts of Dalmanutha." (Mark viii. 10.) When Jesus left them, He and His disciples again departed to "the other," or the western side. They appear to have set out on their voyage hastily, even forgetting to take bread, except one loaf which was in the ship. They might have been speaking about this, when Jesus sought to lead their thoughts to spiritual truths, and took occasion to give them a solemn warning against the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees were self-righteous formalists; the Sadducees sceptics, free thinkers, and half infidels. Their false doctrines our Lord describes as *leaven*. Like leaven, they might seem a small thing compared to the whole body of truth; like leaven, once admitted they would work secretly and noiselessly; like leaven, they would gradually change the whole character of the religion with which they were mixed. How much is often contained in a single word! It was not merely the open danger of heresy, but "leaven" of which the Apostles were to beware. Let us remember that this saying of our Lord was intended for all time. It was not meant only for the generation to which it was spoken, but for the perpetual benefit of the Church of Christ. He who spoke it saw with prophetic eye the future history of Christianity. He would have us know that there will always be Pharisees and Sadducees in the ranks of Christians. Their succession shall never fail: their name may change, but their spirit will always remain.

Finally, let us make a personal use of this caution by keeping up a holy jealousy over our souls. We live in a world where Pharisaism and Sadduceeism are continually striving for the mastery in the Church of Christ. Some want to add to the Gospel and some to take away from it. Against both errors let us watch and pray and stand upon our guard. Let our principle be, "The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth:" nothing added to it and nothing taken away.

Through faith in Thee the soul receives
New life, though dead before ;
And he who in Thy name believes
Shall live to die no more.

To Thee we look, to Thee we bow ;
On Thee for help we call :
Our life and resurrection Thou,—
Our hope, our joy, our all.

XLVIII.

Christ's Knowledge of Man's Heart. What Christ Forbids, Advises, and Promises.

ST. JOHN VI. 22—29.

22 The day following, when the people which stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was none other boat there, save that one whereinto his disciples were entered, and that Jesus went not with his disciples into the boat, but *that* his disciples were gone away alone ;

23 (Howbeit there came other boats from Tiberias nigh unto the place where they did eat bread, after that the Lord had given thanks :)

24 When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus.

25 And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they

said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither ?

26 Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.

27 Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you : for Him hath God the Father sealed.

28 Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God ?

29 Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.

THE time that our Lord held the above remarkable discourse seems to have been after the feeding of the multitude mentioned in the former part of this chapter ; also on the day following His miracle of walking on the sea, described by St. John in the verses immediately preceding those just read. The people supposed that Jesus had entered one of the boats from Tiberias, and gone to Capernaum after His disciples had departed. Tiberias stood on the western borders of the lake. It was so called in honour of the Emperor Tiberius, and was built by Herod Antipas, and was made by him

the capital of Galilee. This city afterwards became a celebrated seat of Jewish learning. It is now called *Tabaria*, and is a considerable place, chiefly occupied by Turks, and is very hot and unhealthy.

When the people "saw that Jesus was not there," they "took shipping:" that is, went into the boats and came to Capernaum, as being the ordinary residence of Jesus they expected to find Him there.

Instead of replying to their question, "Rabbi, when camest Thou hither?" the Lord Jesus at once exposes the false motives of those who followed Him for the sake of the loaves and fishes. They seemed at first sight ready to believe in Him and do Him honour; but He knew the inward springs of their conduct, and was not deceived: "Ye seek me," He said, "not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled."

The Lord Jesus, we should never forget, is still the same: He never changes. He reads the secret motives of all who profess and call themselves Christians: He knows exactly why they do all they do in their religion: the reasons why they go to church, and why they receive the Sacrament, why they attend family prayers, why they keep Sunday holy,—all are naked and open to the eyes of the Great Head of the Church. By His actions are weighed as well as seen. "Man looketh on the outward appearance; but the Lord looketh on the heart." (1 Sam. xvi. 7.)

Let us be real, true, and sincere in our religion, whatever else we are. The sinfulness of hypocrisy is very great; but its folly is greater still. It is not hard to de-

ceive ministers, relatives, and friends: a little decent outward profession will often go a long way; but it is impossible to deceive Christ: "His eyes are as a flame of fire" (Rev. i. 14): He sees us through and through. Happy are those who can say, "Thou, Lord, who knowest all things, knowest that we love Thee." (John xxi. 17.)

We should mark also in this passage *what Christ forbids*. He told the crowds who followed Him so diligently for the loaves and fishes, not to "labour for the meat that perisheth."

This does not mean that we are to make *no effort* for the supply of our wants; but that we are not to manifest *anxiety*, not to make this the main or supreme object of our desire. Our Lord, we may be sure; did not mean to encourage idleness. Labour was the appointed lot of Adam in Paradise; labour was ordained to be man's occupation after the fall; labour is honourable in all men: no one need be ashamed of belonging to "the working classes." What our Lord did mean to rebuke was that excessive attention to labour for the body, while the soul is neglected, which prevails everywhere in the world; the common habit of labouring *only* for the things of time, and letting alone the things of eternity; of minding only the life that now is, and disregarding the life to come. Against this habit He delivers a solemn warning. Surely we must all feel our Lord did not say the words before us without good cause: they are a startling caution which should ring in the ears of many in these latter days. How many in every rank of life are doing the very thing against which Jesus warns us: they are labouring night and

day for "the meat that perisheth," and doing nothing for their immortal souls. Happy are those who learn betimes the respective value of soul and body, and give the first and best place in their thoughts to salvation. One thing is needful: he that seeks *first* the kingdom of God will never fail to find "all other things added to him." (Matt. vi. 23.)

We should mark also *what Christ advises*. When our Lord says, "Labour for the meat that endureth," He teaches very plainly that it is the duty of every one to use every means, and endeavour in every way to promote the welfare of his soul. In the use of prayer, the Bible, and the public preaching of God's Word, we are specially to labour. Our responsibility and accountability, the duty of effort and exertion, appear to stand out unmistakeably in the expression. What God commands, man must always strive to obey: whatever language Christ uses, ministers and teachers must never shrink from using likewise.

We must mark also *what Christ promises*. The "meat that endureth to everlasting life" must doubtless mean that satisfaction of the cravings of soul and conscience which is the grand want of human nature. Mercy and grace, pardon of sin, and a new heart are the two great gifts which alone can fill the soul; and once given, are never taken away, but must endure for ever. Both here and in many other places we must always remember that "meat" did not exclusively mean "flesh" in the days when the Bible was translated, as it does now. The Greek word rendered "meat" here means simply "food" of any kind.

When our Lord makes this promise of the "meat that endureth," He appears to make one of the widest and most general offers to unconverted sinners that we have anywhere in the Bible. The men to whom He was speaking were beyond question carnal-minded and unconverted men; yet even to them Jesus says, "The Son of Man shall give unto you." This seems an unmistakeable statement of Christ's willingness and readiness to give pardon and grace to any sinner. How encouraging are these words. Whatever we need for the relief of our hungering souls, Christ is ready and willing to bestow; whatever mercy, grace, peace, and strength we require, the Son of Man will give freely, immediately, abundantly, and eternally. He is "sealed" and appointed and commissioned by God the Father for this very purpose. Like Joseph in the Egyptian famine, it is His office to be the Friend and Almoner and Reliever of a sinful world: He is far more willing to give than man is to receive. The more that sinners apply to Him, the better will He be pleased.

God in the Gospel of His Son
Makes His eternal counsels known;
Here love in all its glory shines,
And truth is drawn in fairest lines.

Oh, grant us grace, Almighty Lord,
To mark and learn Thy Holy Word!
Its truths with meekness to receive,
And by its holy precepts live.

XLIX.

Christ the Bread of Life.

None cast out who come to Him.

ST. JOHN VI. 30—40.

30 They said therefore unto him, What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work?

31 Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat.

32 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.

33 For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.

34 Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread.

35 And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

36 But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not.

37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

38 For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.

39 And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.

40 And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.

OUR Lord here continues His conversation with those inquirers who had followed Him from the other side of the Sea of Galilee, and who it would appear sincerely desired to be taught the way of life: they expected to find that way, as other sinners commonly do, by their works. The idea of doing something to merit salvation is one of the last that the anxious sinner ever surrenders. We see in these verses the spiritual ignorance and unbelief of the natural man: twice over is this brought out and exemplified. When our Lord

bade his hearers "labour for the meat which endureth," they immediately began to think of works to be done, and a goodness of their own to be established. *Doing* was their only idea of the way to heaven. Again, when our Lord spoke of Himself as One sent from God, and the need of believing on Him at once, they turned round with the question—"What sign showest Thou? what dost Thou work?" Fresh from the mighty miracle of the loaves and fishes, one might have thought they had had a sign sufficient to convince them; taught by our Lord Himself, one might have expected a greater readiness to believe. But, alas! there are no limits to man's dullness, prejudice and unbelief in spiritual matters: it is a striking fact that the only thing which our Lord is said to have "marvelled" at during His earthly ministry was man's "unbelief." (Mark vi. 6.)

We should also observe the high honour Christ puts on *faith* in *Himself*. The great Head of the Church declares that believing on Him is the highest and greatest of all works: it is the "work of God."

Doubtless our Lord did not mean that there is any thing meritorious in believing: man's faith at the very best is feeble and defective. But our Lord did mean that faith in Himself, as the only Saviour, is the first act of the soul which God requires at a sinner's hands. Till a man believes on Jesus, and rests on Him as a lost sinner, he is nothing: when the Father sees a sinner casting aside his own righteousness, and simply trusting in His dear Son, He is well pleased. Faith in Christ is the root of all saving religion, and the hardest of all spiritual acts to the natural man: he that has learned

to feel his sins, and to trust Christ as a Saviour, has learned the hardest and greatest lessons in Christianity; he has been in the best of schools—he has been taught by the Holy Ghost.

In the thirty-fifth verse our Lord speaks of Himself as the “bread of life.” He would have us know that He Himself is the appointed food of man’s soul, which is by nature starving and famishing through sin. Christ is given by God the Father to be the Satisfier, Reliever, and Physician of man’s spiritual need: in His mediatorial office; in His atoning death; in His priesthood; His grace, love, and power; in Him alone will empty souls find their wants supplied. In Him there is life: He is “the bread of life.” With what divine and perfect wisdom this name is chosen! Bread is necessary food: we can manage tolerably well without many things on our table, but not without bread. So is it with Christ: we must have Christ or die in our sins. Bread is food that suits all. So is it with Christ: He is just the Saviour that meets the wants of every class. Bread is food that we need daily: other kinds of food we take perhaps only occasionally; but we want bread every morning and evening in our lives. So is it with Christ: there is no day in our lives but we need His blood, His righteousness, His intercession, and His grace. —Well may He be called “the bread of life.”

We read also that Jesus said, “Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.” What does coming mean? It means that movement of the soul which takes place when a man, feeling his sins, and finding out that he cannot save himself, hears of Christ, applies

to Christ, trusts in Christ, lays hold on Christ, and leans all his weight on Christ for salvation: when this happens a man is said, in Scripture language, to "come" to Christ.

What did our Lord mean by saying, "I will in no wise cast him out"? He meant that He will not refuse to save any one who comes to Him, no matter what he may have been: his past sins may have been very great; his present weakness and infirmity may be very great; but if he comes to Christ by faith, He will receive him graciously, pardon him freely, place him in the number of His dear children, and give him everlasting life.

We have, lastly, in these verses, a saying of Christ about *the will of His Father*." Twice over come the solemn words, "This is the will of Him that sent Me." First, "that every one that seeth the Son may have everlasting life." Secondly, that "of all which He hath given to Christ He shall lose nothing."

These words teach us that Christ has brought into the world a salvation open and free to every one. Our Lord draws a picture of it from the story of the brazen serpent, by which bitten Israelites in the wilderness were healed. Every one that chose to "look" at the brazen serpent might live. Just in the same way every one who desires eternal life may "look" at Christ by faith, and have it freely. There is no barrier, no limit, no restriction. The terms of the Gospel are wide and simple: every one may "look and live."

We are taught, furthermore, that Christ will never allow any soul that is committed to Him to be lost and

cast away. He will keep it safe, from grace to glory, in spite of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Not one bone of His mystical body shall ever be broken, not one lamb of His flock shall ever be left behind in the wilderness. He will raise to glory in the last day the whole flock entrusted to His charge, and not one shall be found missing.

The words, "I will raise him up at the last day," seem to be twice repeated, in order to make it sure that a glorious resurrection shall be the portion of every one that only "looks" at Christ and believes, as well as of those who enjoy the *assurance* that they are given to Christ, and shall never be cast away. What abundant comfort this is for all doubting, trembling sinners, who feel their sins, and yet fancy there is no hope for them. Let such observe that it is the *will* of God the Father, that "every one" who looks at Christ by faith may have everlasting life. Let "every one" therefore "look and live."

God loved the world, and gave His Son
To drink the cup of wrath;
And Jesus says He'll cast out none
That come to Him by faith.

Then, wand'ring souls, to God return,
Free pardon He will give;
Look on your piercéd Lord, and mourn,
And endless life receive!

L.

Many Followers of Christ Offended. Peter's Noble Declaration of Faith.

ST. JOHN VI. 59—69.

59 These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum.

60 Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard *this*, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?

61 When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you?

62 *What* and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?

63 It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

64 But there are some of you

that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.

65 And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.

66 From that *time* many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

67 Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?

68 Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

69 And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

OUR Lord appears to have continued His discourse on the "Bread of Life," and to have more fully explained His meaning, as He taught in the synagogue at Capernaum; still many found His sayings hard to understand, and were offended at what He taught them. It is plain that these were not true believers. Many who followed our Lord about, and were called His "disciples," had no real grace in their hearts, and followed Him from carnal motives. Murmurs and complaints of this kind are very common: they have been, they are, they will be as long as the world stands. To some Christ's sayings appear hard to understand; to others, as in the present case, they appear hard to believe, and harder

still to obey. It is one of the many ways in which the natural corruption of man shows itself : so long as the heart is naturally proud, worldly, unbelieving, and fond of self-indulgence, if not of sin, so long there will never be wanting people who will say of Christian doctrines and precepts, "These are hard sayings ; who can hear them?"

Humility is the frame of mind which we should labour and pray for, if we would not be offended. If we find any of Christ's sayings hard to understand and difficult to obey, we should humbly recollect that He will never require of us impossibilities, and that what He bids us do, He will give us grace to perform. We learn here also that we must beware of putting a carnal meaning on spiritual words. Our Lord says, "It is the Spirit that quickeneth." By this He means that it is the Holy Ghost who is the special Author of spiritual life in man's soul. By His agency it is first imparted, and afterwards sustained and kept up. If the Jews thought He meant that man could have spiritual life by bodily eating or drinking, they were greatly mistaken.

Our Lord says, "The flesh profiteth nothing." By this He means that neither His flesh nor any other flesh, literally eaten, can do good to the soul. Spiritual benefit is not to be had through the mouth, but through the heart : the soul is not a material thing, and cannot therefore be nourished by material food.

Our Lord says, "The words I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." By this He signifies that His words and teachings, applied to the heart by the Holy Ghost, are the true means of producing spiritual influence and conveying spiritual life. By words

thoughts are aroused, mind and conscience stirred; and Christ's words are specially spirit-stirring and life-giving. We may therefore conclude that the Spirit influences Christ's words on a man's conscience. These words become the parent of thoughts and convictions in the man's mind. From these thoughts springs all the man's spiritual life. In producing these impressions, the Spirit specially employs the agency of Christ's "words," and hence comes the great principle that "His words are spirit and life."

By the sixty-sixth verse we see what an *old sin* backsliding is. When our Lord had explained what He meant by "eating and drinking His flesh and blood," "From that time many went back and walked no more with Him." The true grace of God no doubt is an everlasting possession. From this men never fall away entirely, when they have once received it. "The foundation of God standeth sure:" "My sheep shall never perish." (2 Tim. ii. 19; John x. 28.) But there is counterfeit grace and unreal religion in the Church wherever there is true; and from counterfeit grace thousands may and do fall away. Like the stony-ground hearers, many "have no root in themselves, and so in time of temptation fall away." All blossoms do not come to fruit; all are not Israel which are called Israel. Men may have feelings, desires, convictions, resolutions, hopes, joys, sorrows in religion, and yet never have the grace of God; but this must never shake our faith, and discourage us in our course. There will be backsliders in the Church as long as the world stands; there will always be counterfeit coin where there is true money.

We now come to the noble declaration of faith made by the Apostle Peter. This, like other remarkable passages in our Lord's history, is recorded by *all* the Evangelists. By the previous verse we see that all the twelve were present; and when Jesus asked them, "Will ye also go away?" Peter, with characteristic zeal and fervour, replied for his brethren as well as himself, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."

The confession contained in these words is a very remarkable one. Living in a professedly Christian land, and surrounded by Christian privileges, we can hardly form an adequate idea of its real value. For a humble Jew to say of One whom Scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees agreed in rejecting, "Thou hast the words of eternal life, Thou art the Christ," was an act of mighty faith. No wonder that our Lord said in another place, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. xvi. 17.) But the question with which Peter begins is just as remarkable as his confession: "To whom shall we go?" says the noble-hearted Apostle: "whom shall we follow? To what teacher shall we betake ourselves? Where shall we find any guide to heaven to compare with Thee? What scribe, what pharisee, what sadducee, what priest, what rabbi can show us such words of eternal life as Thou showest?"

The question is one which every true Christian may boldly ask, when urged and tempted to give up his religion, and go back to the world. Where shall we

find such peace and hope and solid comfort as in serving Christ, however poorly we may serve Him? Can we better ourselves by turning our back on Christ, and going back to our old ways? We cannot. Then let us hold on our way and persevere.

There is much that we may profitably learn from Peter's conduct on this occasion. Erring and unstable as he sometimes was, the faith he exhibited in the passage before us is well worthy of imitation. Such bold confessions as his are the truest evidence of living faith, and are required in every age, if men will prove themselves to be Christ's disciples. We too must be ready to confess Christ, even as Peter did. We shall never find our Master and His doctrine popular: we must be prepared to confess Him, with few on our side and many against us; but let us take courage and walk in Peter's steps, and we shall receive Peter's reward. The Lord Jesus takes notice of those who confess Him before men, and will one day confess them as His servants before an assembled world.

Lord Jesus, teach us still to keep
Our eyes on Thee, the Living Way,
That we, once lost and wandering sheep,
From Thee, our God, no more may stray;
But wheresoe'er Thou leadest, we
May follow on most cheerfully.

Astonished, at Thy feet we fall;
Thy love exceeds our highest thought,
Henceforth be Thou our All in All,—
Thou, who our souls with blood hast bought:
May we henceforth more faithful prove,
And ne'er forget Thy ceaseless love.

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